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CATHOLICITY.

A SERMON

Preached in the First Parish Church, Cambridge, Mass.

BY

REV. S. M. CROTHERS.

CAMBRIDGE:

JOHN WILSON AND SON.

University Press.

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J. S. Barrett,
June 8, 1896.

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THE FIRST PARISH CHURCH

OF CAMBRIDGE

MASS.

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CATHOLICITY.

Can two walk together, except they be agreed? — Amos iii. 3.

Nor the least inspiring article of the ancient Christian creed was that which expressed faith in the "Holy Catholic Church." It meant more than faith in a great spiritual ideal: it expressed the belief that that ideal was actually being realized. It was as if a man should say, "I believe in justice and the higher civilization," and then should add, "and I believe in my country." That would be saying that, for him, justice and civilization had been embodied in the institutions of his own dearly loved land.

So the believer, after expressing his faith in the great verities of religion, adds triumphantly, "And, more than that, I believe in my fellow-believers. I believe not only in the spiritual life, but also in all those who are trying to live such a life. I believe in their sincerity, in their devotion, and in their final victory. I believe not only in the good cause, but also in the army that is fighting for it. I am willing to take a lowly place in that army, to share its hardships, and to submit to its discipline."

Religion thus becomes not merely a private interest, but a public concern, capable of being incorporated in a worthy form. It has not only a spirit, but a body.

One can scarcely fail to notice a revival among us of this catholic temper. Sectarianism, especially in

America, has had free course. With fervent but narrow zeal, each sect has emphasized its own peculiar doctrines, and magnified its own work. The competitive spirit has supplied the stimulus to religion as to trade, and with the same result. Unlimited competition has meant waste. Churches have multiplied beyond measure, while the idea of the Church has declined in dignity and power. In many a village, fast relapsing into paganism, the rival meeting-houses stand only as monuments of a divided Christendom.

The situation has become so bad that people are beginning to look about them for a remedy. For it is not merely the *waste* of sectarian competition, but its *danger*, that emphasizes the need of unity. While the friends of religion have been dividing, the forces most dangerous to society have learned the secret of large and powerful combinations. The combination of the greedy for unjust gain threatens the social order. On every hand we see examples of successful co-operation in unrighteousness, with elaborate machinery invented and utilized for unworthy ends.

Shall there not be a combination for righteousness that shall be adequate to our needs? There is moral force enough in any community to work its reformation, if it could only be brought to bear upon the important points. To the Church men look as to an institution fitted to be the organ of the higher social life. It is with profound disappointment that they perceive that it lacks that unity which is necessary for the task that is proposed.

But how may this religious unity, of which we perceive the need, be fostered?

There are those who imagine that it is possible to return to that kind of unity which was so rudely shat-

tered by the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. The strength of the Roman and, to a lesser extent, of the Anglican communions, lies in the fact that they claim to preserve the historic continuity of Christendom. The one true church, it is said, still lives, surrounded though it be by a multitude of warring sects. All that is necessary is that those who have strayed should return to the fold.

But the appeal is as futile as would be the invitation of an English statesman at the present day to the people of the United States to resume their allegiance to the English crown. We have to deal with accomplished facts and present conditions.

The historic Catholic Church, in its best estate, gave us only a symbol, and that an imperfect one, of what we desire. It was not, as a matter of fact, a union of all good men for good works and for the furtherance of the spiritual life. There were moments when it was this; but often its great power was used to further narrow ecclesiastical ends. When Ambrose as bishop stood before the blood-stained emperor and refused him entrance into the Church, we perceive one of the great moments. The bishop stood as the embodied conscience of Christendom; we hear Holy Church actually speaking with authority to a sinful man. But too seldom were there such exhibitions of spiritual might. When the Church, in its effort to enforce unity, attempted to stifle the growing freedom of thought, rebellion was inevitable.

The catholicity of our age cannot be a reproduction of that of the "ages of faith," nor can it be attained through the conning of any "Grammar of Assent." This is an age of doubt, of discontent, of free inquiry, and of restless endeavor. These forces will have free play; and ambitious plans which ignore them must fail.

But, accepting the actual conditions, can we not do something to economize spiritual force and make it more effective? I think that what is most practicable does not lie within the sphere of ecclesiastical politics, and is not to be brought about by any compromise with principle. It must come through a better understanding of our principles and a higher loyalty to them.

There must first be a frank recognition of honest differences. People differ in opinion and in purpose; and in this fact we have the natural limitation to all organized effort. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed" — at least as to their direction and rate of progress? Those who work together must agree that the object is worth working for.

Just here lies the weakness of all schemes for formal religious union that are the expressions only of good-natured tolerance or the desire for fellowship. Tolerance makes me willing that my friend should go his own way, but it affords no motive to make me go with him. I bid him "God speed" on a path which I acknowledge may be right for him, but along which I have no inclination to follow. The sentiment of good-fellowship is strong enough to make me accompany an acquaintance on a morning stroll, but it is not of itself enough to make me leave all and go upon a long and toilsome march. People are not likely to enlist in an army merely from the desire for comradeship. Men meet together in a great Parliament of Religion, and under the influence of the expansive sympathy of the occasion it seems as if the hour for complete union had already come. But the spell is broken when some one says, "Now let us *do* something." Immediately the questions come: What shall we do? How shall we do it?

In the conflicting answers we perceive that with many

men there are still many minds. We may tolerate all: we can only heartily work with those with whom we are in substantial agreement. We may admire the sanctity of the Hindoo saint; yet we are not quick to give money for the erection of a new temple on the Ganges. Our hearts are touched by the devotion of some missionary of the cross; but when he asks us to share in the same sacrifice, we find that the "missionary nerve" was cut when we came to doubt the truth of his creed.

We cannot agree in all points with our neighbors, and we cannot work with them for objects which we do not approve. When we come to the parting of the ways, let us frankly admit the fact. We cannot follow what for us is a devious and mistaken path for the sake of pleasant companionship.

But when we have learned the lesson of independence, we are prepared for that of true fellowship. Where we differ from our friends, we must walk alone; *but only so far as we differ, and no farther*. In the places where we agree, let us walk together and work together.

Here is the sphere of action of that catholic temper which grows up in an atmosphere of freedom. It gives up the attempt to promote unity by coercion or by compromise, and it accepts the more modest task of encouraging united action along those lines where there is already substantial agreement. It calls, not for less, but for more discrimination. We need to discriminate so accurately that we shall perceive, not only where our differences begin, but also where they end.

Let there be clear seeing and frank speaking, as well as brotherly feeling. Where there is a real issue, let it not be obscured. But let us see it in its real proportions, and do not let it in turn obscure agreements that are just as real. Divisions there must be, but let them

be along the natural lines of cleavage. We shall find that they are not so deep as sectarian zeal imagines. The deepest of them do not run through all our activities, or affect all our thinking.

The differences, for example, between Romanists and Protestants, or between the Orthodox and Liberal parties, are too important to be ignored. So long as they exist, they render co-operation along certain lines impossible. It will not do to say that the points of difference are unessential, and should be suppressed in the interest of fraternity. This is begging the question. But though the several parties must work separately for the propagation of their distinctive beliefs, it is a hasty assumption that this must prevent them from working together for purposes which they have in common. Indeed, in just the sphere where the sight of the divisions of Christendom is most distressing the division is unnecessary. Nothing but ignorance of one another prevents our effective union of effort for civic righteousness, for the defence of the sacredness of the family, for charity, and for personal purity and temperance. Here is not neutral ground, where members of different sects may tolerate each other; here is an urgent work, to which all alike have been pledged. What we have been doing separately and weakly we must do unitedly and triumphantly. In such work, new ties are formed, larger sympathies grow, and there comes the sense of genuine comradeship. Those who work together for these great ends feel that they already are members of one body.

The clearer our perception of each special object of religious endeavor, the quicker will be our recognition of those who are in real affiliation with us. There can be no other test applied than their response to the object presented.

Is there a work of practical righteousness to be done? The only question is, Who is willing to work with us to accomplish it? Inquiry into theological belief or abstract theory is here an impertinence. The searching question of Jesus goes to the point: Who was neighbor to him who fell among thieves? The test of neighborliness was not agreement in opinion, but willingness to help.

But abstract theory has also its place. When we seek truth, in its severest forms, we go, not to those necessarily of the kindest hearts, but to those of most unclouded understanding, and whose minds have the widest horizons. Just so far as we agree with them in their search for truth, we walk with them.

And when the call for worship comes, it introduces us to other companions. We unite in aspiration with people with whom we cannot agree in opinion. We may respond to the same symbols, though we explain them differently. Conscious of the same needs and desires, we are one in "the fellowship of mystery." This fellowship is not the less real because it cannot be translated into the fellowship of thought and action. We may be fellow-worshippers with those who are not our fellow-workers, just as we may be fellow-workers with those who are not fellow-worshippers.

The varied relationships in which people meet in a complex civilization must give the characteristic of the higher religious unity. The earlier and cruder method was to unite by external pressure, crushing out individuality. The higher union is the weaving of many threads into a seamless fabric.

THE
FUNCTION OF RELIGION.

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And one out of the multitude said unto him, Master, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me. But he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. — LUKE XII. 13, 14.

WE can see that man pushing his way through the multitude. There is an eagerness in his motion as of one preoccupied with an absorbing purpose. The others are receptive, ready to respond to the words that come. But their interest seems vague compared with his intensity. The current of his personal feeling sweeps all before it. He has been attracted by the fame of the new teacher, and has heard of his strange power over the wills of those who listen to him. Here is an influence which he may use. He can restrain himself no longer. Suddenly he breaks in upon the discourse: "Master, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me."

The demand comes like a gust of wind out of a narrow valley, striking the surface of a peaceful sea. The speech of Jesus had been calm and deep, but his words were mere generalities to this man. All his interests had narrowed down to what concerned himself. He had been brooding over his own wrongs till there was no room in his mind for any other thought. He felt that the one thing of importance was the quarrel with his

brother. What have you to say about his treatment of me? What about the division of the inheritance?

But Jesus declines to act as judge in the dispute; and turning to the people, warns them against covetousness, and says, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

And can we not see the man, angry and disappointed, pushing his way back through the crowd as eagerly as he had pushed forward? He had come with a demand, urgent and practical. If the teacher were indeed wise, why had he not helped him? He wanted to have the matter of the inheritance settled once for all. What bearing on this had the warning against covetousness?

The demand of the man brings up the question of the real function of religion and the kind of help we may expect from purely religious teaching. We are all conscious of needing help, but we are not always aware of the kind of help we need. Often the patient goes to his physician with a preconceived opinion of his own case, which he expects to have confirmed. He asks, "What will you do for this disease of mine?" The physician, perhaps, will answer: "Nothing. The real trouble lies elsewhere; when I get at that, these symptoms that now alarm you will take care of themselves."

As the physician must insist on making his own diagnosis, so must those to whom we go for spiritual help. He who prescribes remedies, simply because they are expected, without satisfying himself that he has traced the difficulty to its source, is only a quack.

In religion the word to conjure with, to-day, is the word "practical." People are impatient of mere theory, and demand a religion that can be applied definitely to immediate needs. And this demand is essentially wholesome and right. The religion that dwells in the clouds,

that cannot be applied to every-day uses, that ignores the questions of the hour, must be as weak as it is vague.

But in this insistence, that religion must stand the test of practical experience, we must be careful that we are practical in the best sense of the word; for there is a lower sense that is easily mistaken for it.

From the same root as the word practical comes the word pragmatism; and many who pride themselves on their practical views, in reality wander over the rocks of a barren pragmatism. The pragmatist man is one who, having lost sight of great principles, is busy over trifles; and because he is busy, imagines that he is accomplishing something. He has so much to do that he has no time to refresh himself by great thoughts, or to enjoy an inspiring view. Poor man, he has no time to become wise or happy or humble. He takes himself and his work too seriously, and all the universe besides too lightly.

And near by the stony field of pragmatism lies the jungle of empiricism. The empiricist is one who, scornful of theory, trusts only to his own experience and observation, and so is soon "lost in a labyrinth of endless details." Alike in medicine and in morals, the method of empiricism has been found wanting. We speak of experience as a teacher; but would it not be truer to speak of it as a text-book? Great truths are written there, but they are in strange characters. We need more than experience; we need the insight to read our experience aright.

The reply of Jesus must have seemed, to the man who called out to him, very unsatisfactory. The answer was not direct and in the line of his expectancy. It was because Jesus made his own diagnosis, and prescribed accordingly. Here were two brothers quarrelling over-

their inheritance. He did not care to ascend the judgment-seat and listen to their endless recriminations. But back of any specific act of injustice lay the conditions that made the strife possible. There was a fault which accuser and accused had in common. Given, two brothers, each attempting to over-reach the other; to divide so equitably that each should be satisfied. That was the problem presented. Jesus did not attempt to solve it. He professed no skill in such matters. But he had a wisdom that was better than skill, and he told the people how it was possible to live so that such controversies should not arise. The root of the mischief lay in covetousness; the real remedy lay in a reconstruction of the whole idea of life. The avaricious man is a victim of his own greed. He is deluded by a false estimate of values. Once make a man believe that he is himself of more value than anything that he possesses, and he will perceive that to attempt to over-reach another is to cheat himself. Teach a man self-respect, and he will, of his own accord, withdraw from ignoble strife.

Here we see the method of Jesus, as it has been the method of all the wisest men. He sees the special circumstance in the light of the universal law. The special difficulty is to him only of importance as it takes the mind back to the disease of which it is a single symptom.

Men came to him troubled about the methods of worship. He looked upon them and saw that they were angry and uncharitable, and said: "You are in no condition now to worship at all. First let the brother be reconciled to brother, let him learn the lesson of human kindness, and then he will be prepared to worship God aright."

So when there came those who sought some rule by

which they might judge the hearts of others, he said: "You are not ready for this; self-criticism must come first. Judge yourselves before you attempt to judge others. When you have judged yourselves most severely, you will perhaps be most inclined to judge others charitably."

And so, in regard to this question about the inheritance, he would say, "You ask for justice, but you must first make sure that it is justice that you desire." It must be enshrined in the character before it can be manifested to the world. Justice is something more than the maintenance of the balance of power in the warfare between conflicting self-interests. One becomes truly just only when he is in the presence of an ideal law.

Do you call the method of Jesus impractical because it does not adjust the differences between sordid, petty-minded, selfish men, but appeals to a disinterested and generous manhood?

Let us admit that there is still necessity for other methods. So long as there are wilful criminals, there must be courts and jails. Where the higher law is not respected, there must be, in self-defence, an appeal to a lower law. But when this is admitted, we must insist that the safeguards and provisions of a merely prudential morality are only temporary. That which, in reality, guards our homes against invasion, is not the locks and bolts of the door, nor the policeman in the street, but the fact that our fellow-citizens are not thieves and murderers, but are, in the main, honest, generous, and kindly. And each one of us is safer and freer by virtue of every increase to the common stock of honesty and generosity.

It is the function of religion to stimulate and develop the higher impulses of our nature; it is to generate the

force to do our needed work. How amazingly the problems of existence are simplified when the higher powers are allowed free play. They do easily and naturally what otherwise would be poorly done and with endless friction.

Suppose one comes asking for some elaborate code of laws for the family. He seeks some plan by which domestic difficulties may be adjusted. How may envious and jealous people live in close companionship, and each one be protected in his rights? Common-sense refuses to formulate such a domestic constitution. As long as people are envious and jealous, happiness is impossible. The one practical thing is to get rid of envy and jealousy. Where love reigns, as it ought to reign, the questions which are most perplexing will not arise.

And everywhere is it not the same? Have you never been in an assembly where party feeling ran high, and there was angry controversy over some petty issue? Men with diplomatic skill tried in vain to make a satisfactory adjustment. Appealing to what was little in the mind, they only evoked new and conflicting forms of littleness. And then there arose some one with no new plan to propose, a man not clever in diplomacy, but with "simple truth his utmost skill." He did not attempt to conciliate the contending factions or take into account their prejudices. He took for granted, in spite of appearances, that he was speaking to fair-minded and generous men. And the very appeal brought out the qualities which had not till then asserted themselves. Under the influence of the manly words the tone of the assembly changed. Then, in a new temper, the question which had caused the discord was taken up again, but only to be quickly dropped. Suddenly people saw that there was nothing to dispute about.

And amid the world's ignorant and sordid strife, this is the great function of religion. It is to recall men to their best selves, and to the real business of their lives. It is to make them see their actions in the right proportions. Its aim is not to make a truce for a day, but to proclaim the necessary conditions on which may be established the peace of God. It takes our minds from the accidents and incidents of life, and directs them to eternal principles. Its function is that of that ideal love of which Shakespeare wrote:—

“It was builded far from accident;
It suffers not in smiling pomp, nor falls
Under the blow of thrall'd discontent,
Where to the inviting time our fashion calls:
It fears not policy, that heretic,
That works on leases of short numbered hours,
But *all alone stands hugely politic.*”

The religion that can build up characters of noble simplicity; the religion that relies on no artifice, but appeals directly to the highest instincts,—requires no apologist. Men need it as they need nothing else. In its simple strength it sets at naught our cunning contrivances. While it rebukes our petty policy and purblind practicality, it is itself “hugely politic,” ideally practical.





“What must I do to be saved?”

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“WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?”

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

“Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”

“We are saved by hope.”

“He that endureth to the end shall be saved.”

“Her sins being many are forgiven, for she loved much.”

“Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

“What is written in the law?”

“This do and thou shalt live.”

I TAKE these selections from the words of Jesus and his disciples as giving answers to the question of the trembling jailer at Philippi, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

In some sort this question rises from every heart when once it becomes conscious of its needs. Looking about, the perplexed soul is amazed at the dangers which beset it on every hand; and it sends forth

“A sudden, sharp, and bitter cry,
As of a wild thing taken in a trap,
Which sees the trapper coming through the wood.”

Foreseeing some evil destiny, it cries out: “How may I escape? How may I be shielded from impending dangers?”

And every gospel, every word of good cheer, must have some kind of an answer to this cry for help. If you have no answer to the call of those conscious of

need, if you address only the self-satisfied and contented, you may have a philosophy, but you have no glad tidings.

We read how, when Jesus had come into the synagogue in his own country, he read from the unknown prophet the words, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach glad tidings to the poor.” And when he had read the passage “he closed the book, and gave it to the minister, and sat down.” And we are told that “the eyes of all that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.” And this earnest gaze turned to amazement when the teacher opened his lips again, and said, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.”

And whatever else any of us may or may not see in the life and words of Jesus of Nazareth, we must all of us see the fulfilment of this scripture. He preached good news to the poor, the oppressed, the disappointed. His chosen work was to save those whom the world had given up for lost.

But theologians have not been content with this. They have sought to reduce the helpfulness which men found in the life and work of Jesus to some formula. The word “salvation” has taken a technical sense, and we are told of the “plan” or “scheme” of salvation which Jesus came to reveal. The very terms used prepare us to expect something artificial and elaborate, and we are not disappointed when the plan is explained to us.

But the difficulty lies in this, that by the same logical method by which one plan is formulated, we may formulate any number of plans.

When the jailer at Philippi asks, “What must I do to be saved?” the answer is: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Here, says the Evangelical teacher, is the one essential doctrine, — justification by faith alone. There

is one way of salvation, and only one. Believe, and all will be well with you. But, strangely enough, we find Paul himself refusing to be bound by the logic of his own words. If he says we are saved by faith, he also says that we are saved by hope; and again he tells us that it is possible for us to work out our own salvation. We turn to another apostle and we read: “Receive with meekness the implanted [or inborn] word, which is able to save your soul.” This is the gospel of the mystics, who believe in the word of God written on the heart.

We turn to the words of Jesus, and hear him saying: “He that endureth to the end shall be saved.” We say, this has a familiar sound, for thus the stoical philosophers have always taught, that only through manly endurance, through personal victory in each conflict, may we be saved from an evil fate. It is a word of high import to the strong, but scarcely glad tidings to the weak and discouraged. Is it not what we hear from a modern poet?

“And will not then the immortal armies scorn
The world’s poor routed leavings?

He who flagged not in the earthly strife,
From strength to strength advancing, — only he,
His soul well knit and all his battles won,
Mounts, and that hardly, to eternal life.”

Truly “narrow is the gate that leadeth unto life.” But again we listen to Jesus. He is speaking to a woman who is one of “the world’s poor routed leavings.” All her battles have been lost. But he speaks to her not of the scorn of the immortal armies, not even of the narrow way which she had missed. She had sinned much; but she had loved much, and that love of hers

should save her. Here we have the teaching of justification by love.

Once when he is asked, “How may I inherit eternal life?” he points out the way which ascetics have chosen, the way of absolute renunciation: “Go sell all that thou hast and give to the poor.” Again, when the same question is asked him, he points to the moral law, and says: “Do this and thou shalt live.”

And so it has come to pass that men have found, now here, now there, the words which seem addressed to their inmost souls.

Saint Anthony reads the words: “He that would be my disciple, let him sell all and give to the poor, and follow me.” And so he sells all, and goes out alone into the wilderness, through sorrow and sickness and loneliness, seeking the way of life. And in the wilderness he finds it, “and amid the charnels of the dead hears the murmur of the fountain-head.”

Thomas à Kempis reads, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,” and gives himself up to a life of simple meditation and prayer, and in the imitation of Christ, finds the heart of the gospel.

“The just shall live by faith. He that believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved,” reads Luther in the Bible in the old monastery, and the thought grows within him till the monastery walls are broken by it.

“As many as are led by the spirit of God they are the sons of God,” reads George Fox as he walks alone through the English meadows, and priesthoods and institutions became to him but empty mockeries: to be led by the Spirit, to obey its every admonition, — this is to be saved by Christ.

“The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin,” reads John Wesley and a little band of eager scholars in the University at Oxford; and though to others this

may be a hard saying and a stumbling-block on the way of faith, to them it was the power of God and the wisdom of God, and it has been mighty to the pulling down of the strong places of iniquity.

“Upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” reads John Henry Newman to another little band of scholars in that same University not a century later. To him, as he looked out upon the world, Protestant Orthodoxy seemed weak and illogical, and Protestant Liberalism seemed drifting inevitably upon the rocks of absolute denial. Then, as an evangel indeed to the struggling heart, came the thought that, after all, there had been ordained that which should stand; that Jesus had left an historic church, firm against all changes of opinion, against which the very gates of hell might not prevail; that standing within its sacred walls one was safe, — safe forever. And so the gentle, earnest scholar sang, —

“Lead, kindly Light! amid th’ encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on!”

And following this light, turning from the garish day of modern thought, he sought safety in the ancient Church.

Now, who shall judge between these men? Shall we say that one of them was right, and had truly learned the secret of the Gospels, while the others were altogether mistaken?

If we are to decide between the conflicting claims of different schemes of salvation, each claiming exclusive validity, then to accept one must be to reject the claims of the others. If we attempt to formulate our own exclusive plan, then we shut ourselves out from sympathy with those who with another philosophy than ours have sought the way of life and have believed that they have found it.

But what if once for all we give up the attempt to formulate any one plan which all men must accept? What if we no longer try to set limits to the power of God or the possibilities of man? What if we frankly acknowledge that there may be many ways of salvation, from the manifold dangers of life?

Immediately the difficulties in the way of universal sympathies vanish. All good men are not wise, but we acknowledge the goodness, even when manifested in unwise forms. Our faith in the communion of saints is not disturbed, even when we find the saints attributing their most sacred impulses to sources that seem to us altogether inadequate. When we reject the explanation we need not throw any discredit on the spiritual experience. It is enough to know that men find peace and strength in ways fitted to their own needs. I would not dare say that George Fox was not led by the Spirit; that Martin Luther was not justified before God and before men by the sturdy faith that was in him; that John Wesley did not receive sweet assurance of pardoned sin; and that the light that led John Henry Newman through years of blameless living was not, for him, a kindly light. I cannot accept the exclusive claims of any of these men, but I recognize the fruits of the Divine life in all of them. There are as many ways of salvation as there are different characters and conditions among men.

When we give up the pedantic conception of abstract humanity, suffering from abstract evil and capable of being saved by an abstraction, the New Testament becomes a vital book, and religious history becomes thrillingly interesting. Here we have the record of the way in which actual men and women overcame actual difficulties. And then we are first prepared to appreciate the work that is now before us. Everything becomes

concrete and personal. The unity of humanity is seen through almost infinite variety. Each man is conscious of his own need, sees the danger that threatens him, and, seeking a way of escape, cries, “What must *I* do to be saved?” And the answer, if it is to be effective, must be as personal as the cry.

When we listen to the appeals of real men and women, we are struck by the fact that the first need is not for help from purely spiritual dangers, but from those which are physical in their origin. Men are born into the world with physical needs and weaknesses. They find the world a great battle-field over which contesting armies are marching, and into this great battle they are thrust unarmed, undisciplined. Thousands there are every day who are being trampled down in this conflict. And from them comes the cry: “What can we do to be saved from the cruel fate that awaits us? What can we do, not to lead the most glorious and beautiful lives possible, but simply to live at all, and hold our own against hunger and disease and nakedness?” And what can be the answer to this cry? Will it be enough for you to say, “You may be saved by faith, by prayer, by meditation, by worship?” Is not the real gospel here a simpler and more matter-of-fact thing? Is it not found in those who teach habits of industry, forethought, economy, and the patient culture of brain and hand?

The first gospel which needs to be proclaimed, now and always, is this old despised gospel of work,—a gospel which is being preached by anvil and plow and whirling machinery; the glad tidings to the poor that it is possible so to live and so to work that the forces of nature shall not destroy us, but shall become ministers helping us to provide for our wants. The laborer toiling day after day, the merchant by incessant industry

and forethought providing for the wants of man, the man of science developing the hidden resources in the earth, the wise teacher developing the hidden resources of the mind, the wise physician battling against disease, —these are all preaching this primitive gospel. We need not be surprised to read that, when the man lay all crushed and bleeding by the Jericho road, he found his real helper not in priest or in Levite, but in a certain matter-of-fact man that was a Samaritan.

But when all this has been done, when salvation has been wrought out from these first necessities of our life, there still remains something to be done. There are dangers which beset the well-fed and the industrious and the prudent just as great as those which beset the unfortunate and the idle. There is always danger that this work of getting a living will destroy the high ideals of life, that our work will degenerate into drudgery, that the man will become a mere machine : —

“For most men in a brazen prison live,
Where in the sun’s hot eye,
With heads bent o’er their toil, they languidly
Their lives to some unmeaning task-work give,
Dreaming of naught beyond their prison wall.
And as, year after year,
Fresh products of their barren labor fall
From their tired hands, and rest
Never yet comes more near,
Gloom settles slowly down over their breast.
Death in their prison reaches them
Unfreed, having seen nothing, still unblest.”

Seeing such a fate as this coming to him, well may the man cry out, “What must I do to be saved?”

Ah! how indeed *can* he be saved? There is no one form that the man may follow that will insure that help.

Go from one person to another, and, speaking to each one who lives hopefully and cheerfully, and who finds life something which is well worth the living, ask, “What is it that has kept you all these years from despair? What is it that has brought fulness and joy into your life?” Would not you find the answers as different as the different characters and experiences? One would tell you it was some word of faith that came to him, some high belief that made him feel that his work was not meaningless drudgery, but that he was working together with God, so that at last he could say, not as a slave, but as a son of God, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” Sometimes it has been the touch of human love coming to the heart, so that the man no longer lives for himself, but, losing himself in the life of another, he has gained a fuller life. Sometimes it has been some high hope that has been set before him, and that, wrought out of great tribulation, has come to him, and he has felt, however dark this present life may be, however black this present moment, beyond is light, and by this hope he has been saved. Sometimes the help has come to one when he had no hope, when he had scarcely a definite faith. Trouble has come; and the man has said: “Now, I must despair. I see nothing beyond that can help me. Worst has come to worst.” Then within him he hears a voice, saying: “Be it so. Let worst come to worst. Look out upon the world, and see it as black as it may be. Whatever comes to you, this at least you can do,—you can meet it manfully. You have no hope to inspire you, then you must struggle on without it.

“‘Strive, though strife lead through endless obstruction
Stage after stage, each rise marred by as certain a fall.’

And so he has striven, enduring what has come to him by the power of steadfast will. And, when the storm has thus been weathered, the sunshine has come again, finding him stronger and better for it all.

In that time of real need, that simple endurance has saved him; for it is always true that he that endureth to the end is saved.

But all these things, you say, will bring salvation from temporary evil, from the passing mood that comes to us, giving strength day by day, perhaps, to meet the trials of life; but what of that darkest shadow of all? What shall you say when life is all over, and we come to look out upon the unseen? What shall save us from terror in that last hour? What shall give us strength for that final agony? The last enemy to be overcome is death. Where may we look for help and strength for that? And as thus we cry, "What shall we do to be saved from this?" many of our old helpers are silent. Silent now are the faithful workers, working day by day; silent the successful man of business; silent the men of science. Then upon that silence of the soul come the sweet voices of the prophets and teachers sent from God, the words of those pure souls who have lived in close communion with the eternal truth. To them we listen, as unto oracles of God.

And what say these holy voices, calm and passionless, as they speak? Listening to them, we find they give us no new form, no magic word, but simply the same old message, spoken now with deeper meaning. The new commandment is the old commandment which we have heard from the beginning: Love on! Keep on loving all that is best worth loving; and when all else fades this love of yours will abide, for love is immortal. Your love will lay hold upon that eternal meaning in which all

time-pictures fade away. Trust on! You say the last step is a step into the dark. So it is; but has not every step been into the dark?

Hope on! Hope to the end, and you will find that to the hopeful soul light comes even amid the darkness. Work on! and, working right manfully, you will find that day by day you are working out your own salvation from every morbid doubt and fear. Live on, the very best and fullest life that you can live. Live cheerfully if you can, gladly if you can, but honestly, manfully always; and he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

We stand outside the little house in which our proper life is to be lived and in which our own proper work awaits us, and we say: "This is a little house, and frail. By and by the rafters will fall in, and we shall perish with it. The door of this house is so lowly and so narrow that no strong helper can come to us here to deliver us. We will go away. Perhaps somewhere upon the heights we shall see the divine Helper, and live with him." But from the hill-tops no vision awaits us; and at last we come back again, and say, "Now we will take up once more our own lives, accepting the conditions that are around us, living as best we may in this little house of ours." And, when we have come back, we say, "All great things are shut out from us now," not knowing that it is at lowliest doors that the Highest stands and knocks. For when once, in all humility, we have entered in, we see the lowly doors growing higher and higher, until we see visions of the Eternal coming to us. And still the doorways are uplifted: we hear a voice calling, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in."

Sources of Consolation.

A SERMON

Preached in the First Parish Church, Cambridge, Mass.

BY

REV. S. M. CROTHERS.



C

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JOHN WILSON AND SON.

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THE SOURCES OF CONSOLATION.

And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the suffering, so also are ye of the comfort.—2 Cor. i. 7.

THERE is a common way of treating consolation as if it were a substance stored away in a safe corner to be used in case of emergency. It is supposed to belong to the *materia medica* of the soul; to be a sort of anodyne or soothing lotion. Sometimes, when we feel the need of it, we go to the place where it is kept, and are greatly disappointed if it has lost its potency. If one does not have a stock of it on hand, he goes to some professional consoler, expecting him to deal out comfort as another man might deal out drugs. There are supposed to be certain beliefs, which are of little use in everyday life, but which have great power for consolation. Even tones of voice are supposed to have this mysterious efficacy. To many persons the institutions of religion have this main purpose. Here, safe from all danger, is a storehouse of consolatory ideas. When a man wants to know what is true, he goes to the teachers of science; when he wants to be comforted, he goes to church. And people criticise different kinds of religion, very much as they criticise different schools of medicine. Certain doctrines they love to hear, not because they are

true, but because they are consoling. They insist on having the "comfortable words" repeated.

I suppose a great part of the intellectual timidity of our time arises from the fact that people thus think of comfort as inhering necessarily in some familiar word or form. The man says: "I can get along very well for the greater part of my life with those truths which my reason sees and my conscience approves. These things are sufficient so long as I am strong and all goes well. But the time is coming when I must face the mystery of sorrow. Then, in the defeat of my desires, facing the inexorable sternness of fate, I want something to sustain and strengthen me." And he thinks of that something as if it were a fetich, kept in some sacred enclosure; as if it were something which before that time of trial he has never used or needed, but which may be brought forth at his demand. And he is afraid to offend the custodians of this treasure which some time may be so necessary for him.

The strength of priestcraft lies in its grasp upon this human weakness. The priest professes to have the magic which men are prone to believe in. He professes to have in his keeping balm for all wounds, healing for all diseases. If he is a good priest, he administers his trust in all humility and purity of heart. If he is a bad priest, he uses his power for the worldly advancement of his order; but good or bad, he accepts the idea of divine favoritism, through which those who come to him receive what they could not find for themselves.

"Earth hath no sorrows," writes Thomas Moore, "that Heaven cannot heal." That expresses the conventionally pious idea. We have brought to mind a division of life into two parts. On the one side is all the sorrow, and on the other side are stored away all the consola-

tions which make amends for the earthly anguish. The keys of the storehouse are in the hands of trusty guardians, with whom we must keep on good terms.

But as I look upon the way in which men actually bear the trials that come to them, I cannot believe that the relation between sorrow and comfort is so distant or so arbitrary. They are not put into different worlds, but mingled in the same world. The rue and the heart's-ease grow out of the same soil, and in obedience to the same blessed laws. Patience and heroism are not qualities that belong to some little order of the saints, who have shared some magical gift; they are qualities human and natural. They are as widely diffused as the sufferings they overcome. How a man bears his sorrow depends upon the kind of man he is. It is a question of character, and character is the slow growth of years. The test comes suddenly, but the preparation for it has been going on silently from the beginning.

When we look for consolation we must not look afar off; its sources are near the sorrows which it heals.

There are cities built upon ground which affords no firm basis for the great buildings which are erected on it. There the architect has a difficult problem. He must dig deep and prepare a place on which the stone foundation may rest. His great effort is to evenly distribute the weight, so that it shall not all come upon one point. Now this is also the problem of human life; it is to distribute its burden evenly, so that it shall not all rest upon one part of the nature, but upon the whole character. The strong man who is able to bear whatever comes to him is one who has learned this lesson. To-day's sorrow comes. If he allows the whole pressure of it to come upon one weak point, he is crushed. But he does not allow it. The fabric of his being is too

soundly constructed for that. The disappointment of a moment comes, but it is distributed over the experience of a lifetime. The temptation presses upon him, but the habits and principles, which are the results of conquests over past temptations, resist the pressure. The man's whole life sustains the weight that is put upon him, and he stands.

The friends of Job, we are told, made an agreement together "to mourn with Job and to comfort him." They had bundles of consolation cut and dried, and they presented these to the sufferer. These things were not what he needed, and he cried, "Miserable comforters are ye all!" It was an experience like that which many of us have had when we have put on an unnatural air, and gone into a house of sorrow with pious platitudes instead of with ready sympathy. We have taken for granted that sorrow changed the character of the sufferer, instead of revealing it. Where we failed, another succeeded. A homely word touched sweet memories of the past or hopes for the future, and courage and strength came back.

I used to say at such times, "Human words can do nothing now." But I have learned that it is at just such times that human words, full of simple friendship, do the most. It is not the distant voice, but the familiar voice, which most we long to hear, and which brings the truest help. It is what is formal and perfunctory that jars upon us.

It is because sudden sorrow seems to open such a gulf between the past and the present, and to take one into a strange country, that the familiar voice brings such soothing. It is one's native language, heard in a far land.

There is no one thought that is consoling at all times. Everything depends on the occasion, and the preparation

for it. We hear, for example, of the consolations of philosophy, and books have been written with that lofty title. Sometimes, when we are depressed in spirits, we go to these books, expecting to find what we need. Instead of that, we find everything cold, formal, and foreign to us. Shall we say then, as many people rashly do, that philosophy has no consolations?

The true answer is that the consolations of philosophy are real, but that they belong to those who have willingly endured the philosophic discipline. The fruit belongs to those who have come through the narrow gate, and not to those who have climbed over the wall. The philosopher may have lost many radiant visions which comforted his youth; but through the very same processes he has gained the strength that sustains him. He has learned to do without many things which once seemed essential, and he has learned the real value of what once he despised. He has learned to love truth for its own sake; to face both good and evil bravely; to look at the world in a broad way, and upon all men with tolerance. Through patient discipline he has come to serenity. If we would enter into his peace, we must share the strenuous toil of mind by which it was attained.

The same disappointment comes to one who, hearing of the consolations of religion, thinks of them as being ready for him when he asks for them, whether he is prepared for them or not. Nothing is more pathetic in the New Testament than the record of the people who came to Jesus expecting immediate help, and who went away "exceeding sorrowful." They wanted to be soothed, and they only heard a new call for renunciation. They wanted to have their worldly hopes confirmed, and he told them that they must give up all they had cared for. They wanted peace, but

he told them that peace on their terms was impossible. So it has always been when religion has been most sincere. Those who came to the prophets pleading, "Prophecy unto us smooth things," found nothing consolatory in the answers.

Yet are the consolations of religion real; only they belong to those who are willing to enter upon the religious life. One must first take up the burden, before he can discover the power which makes it easy to be borne.

Every kind of work undertaken by genuine men brings with it discoveries of inner power. The power comes in response to the need; it is a resource revealed by the occasion.

When we think of Milton in his blindness, we fancy his comfort coming from the marvellous and lofty imagination that could fly away from the earth and dwell with angels and archangels. But when he makes confession of the thought that most helped him, we find that it was something nearer than that. He was consoled for his blindness by the very circumstance that caused it.

"What supports me, dost thou ask?

The conscience, Friend, t' have lost them overplied
In liberty's defence."

And among common men and women, every day unrecorded losses and privations are bravely accepted in the same way. The mother suffers for her child; but she does not repine, for the child is worth it. The honest man loses by his adherence to an unpopular cause; but he has gained something which makes him forget his loss. These do not ask for compensation for what they have endured; their very endurance came from the fact that they had already received the real compensation.

The pessimist treats the capacity for pain as a gratuitous torture. But the fact that in the scale of being the higher creatures are more sensitive than the lower, must be something more than the bitter mockery of nature. When we take the fact of pain out of its relations, and treat it as a thing by itself, pessimism seems the inevitable outcome. Some malignant power must be at work to produce all this misery.

But we have no right to treat it thus. We must put the pain back where it belongs, in its relations to the whole of life. And when we do this, how quickly we come to a more healthy view. The amount of unrelieved sorrow is much less than we had imagined. Life does not move on like a Greek tragedy, with slow and sure movement, to a sombre catastrophe foreseen from the beginning. Its tragedy is like the Shakespearian tragedy, with numberless wholesome distractions and alleviations. The very struggle has its inspiration; it is shot through with hope, and even to the end there is free room for all human passion. And even at the worst it is not all tragedy; from the streets the sound of honest laughter floats, and does not grate upon the ear. Those who suffer have also capacity to enjoy. Only when they shut out the real world, and refuse to open their doors to the homely ministers of consolation, do they sink into despair.

There are mental sufferings that only the thoughtful know, spiritual sufferings that come only to those of spiritual nature. In our day these are more acute than ever before. A person of religious impulse and sensibility centres all his hopes in the doctrines taught him in his childhood. Here for the time he finds rest for his soul. But after a while he is plunged into the midst of the doubts with which the world around him is full.

His early faith leaves him. Then he feels bereft indeed. He must, as he thinks, henceforth wander in the desert, without God and without hope. What hope is there for him? Let him ask himself what is the source of his pain. The answer must be that it lies in that sensitive religious nature with which he has been endowed. Well, through the suffering of that spiritual nature must come at last the spiritual help he needs. His business is only to be true to himself. His aspirations do not die when the objects to which they first clung are destroyed. The very fact that he suffers proves that they are not dead. Going day after day to the sepulchre where his faith lies buried, he finds at last the glad resurrection morning. He finds that his heart has taken hold on a new and larger thought than that which he has lost. He finds again something to trust and to worship.

He finds consolation and peace where before he had looked out on the blackness of despair. There is a consolation which the patient have found in the secret places of their sorrow, and the aspiring when their aspirations seem to have failed. It is the consolation which comes to those who have been loyal to the best that was in them. Partaking of the sorrows of life, they have been partakers also of the comfort.

What shall we say of those deeper and more intimate sorrows, which come inevitably to us all, when those we love are taken away? There is a wicked doctrine that has sometimes been preached, that we should prepare ourselves by hardening the heart. It is foolish, it has been said, to love too deeply those who cannot always remain with us; in the joy of the present we are making more intense the agony of parting.

But experience has refuted this poor argument. Continually we express surprise and say: "How strange it is

that this one, who loved with all his heart, now, when the one he loved is taken away, bears up as he does !” But why should we be surprised? He is just the one who is best prepared to bear it, because it is love that gives the balm, and is the minister of consolation when all is over. It is just the sense that in those blessed days that are gone he did all that could be done, gave all that could be given, that brings calmness now. To have loved less truly would have been to have dried up the fountain from which now comes his purest consolation.

And as we look forward to what awaits ourselves, the same thought comes. The mistaken moralist says : “ We must die at last; let us release our grasp upon the interests of the world; let us reduce life to the minimum. Then there will be fewer tears shed over our graves, and we will have less fear when we come to the end.”

Not so. Those who have loved life most have been least afraid to die. The life full of labor, full of inspiration, full of true ambition, does not end in despair. Consolation comes with the suffering, and the soul is steadfast.

God's Will and Ours.

A SERMON

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GOD'S WILL AND OURS.

And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect. — ROMANS xii. 2 (translation given in the margin of the Revised Version of the New Testament).

THE greatest power we know anything about is the power of will. We may say this even when we confront the mightiest forces of the material universe. For the master must always be greater than the servant. A force that works blindly must be subordinate to a power that is able to direct it to a clearly conceived end. If the only manifestation of that purposeful energy that we call will is in humanity, then man stands on a lonely eminence; he may look down, but there is no reason for him to look up. Worship, reverence, resignation, obedience, — these great words are emptied of their richest meaning.

We talk of obeying the laws of Nature, and yet, unless we think of something behind these laws akin to that which directs our own actions, our attitude is not that of real obedience. We see Nature as a blind giant continually striking out into the dark. At first we are afraid, for if we stand in the line of his blows, we shall certainly be destroyed; but after a time we become too

wise for that, and are careful not to stand where we are likely to be hurt. We step aside and watch the giant. We detect a certain uniformity in his motions, and then the thought suggests itself that we may use his force for our own ends. After that the giant, instead of being our master, becomes our servant.

Carver, the first Englishman to ascend the Mississippi to the falls of St. Anthony, tells us of the way in which the young Indian Chief who accompanied him paid his devotions to the divinity that he believed inhabited the cascade. Taking off the ornaments from his person, he threw them, one by one, into the water, "and, in short, presented to his god every part of his dress that was valuable ; all this while he continued his adorations."

That is what is meant by real Nature worship. It is the impulse to fling all that one has, and even life itself, into the rushing stream. But we cannot imagine one doing this if he believed the river to represent nothing but physical force. In some way it symbolizes a stream of tendency like that of which the human life is conscious, only mightier. The less yields to the greater.

In a very different spirit came the engineers, long after, who developed that water power. They measured it, and then harnessed it to their machinery. To utilize power is a different thing from worshipping power.

The human will cannot be constrained save by the thought of something akin to it, but greater. Dante says, "Ill strives the will against a higher will." In every form of religion there is the faith that there is such a higher will to which man's will owes allegiance. To know this will is wisdom ; to obey this will is blessedness.

But, for the practical conduct of life, we need more than the bare belief that there is a higher purpose than our own. We must know where to look for the mani-

festation of that purpose. How does God, we ask, make known his will to his creatures?

There is a childlike stage of thought wherein it is easy to believe that God makes known his will just as a man does. "The Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" converses freely concerning his plans; or on the mountain he directs his servant, and declares his law; or through a chosen amanuensis he dictates a sacred document which contains his "whole counsel."

These conceptions will not stand when thought becomes serious. It is evident that the will of the Eternal must be manifested in some larger way. It must not be revealed, as it were, by accident and to the few; it must be of no private interpretation.

Now, the different types of piety are determined by the direction in which different people look to learn what the will of God is. The most natural thing to do is to identify it with the existing state of things. If God rules, men argue, then he has willed that things should be as they are. Here we see his purpose made visible to all eyes. Let us see what actually exists, and we shall know what he ordains. The established powers are ordained by him, and all we have to do is to obey them implicitly. The fundamental proposition of this creed is that "whatever is, is right."

A certain kind of piety is the result of this idea. It is the piety of unyielding conservatism. All established customs are sacred in its eyes, all doubt is impious, all discontent with one's condition is blasphemy against God. God willed that the rich man should have a superabundance, and that the poor man should suffer want. Those who would disturb these divine dispensations are mischief-makers. By divine right the king rules. Do

you ask how we may know that he has the divine right? The answer is, because he has been strong enough to make himself king. Success is accepted as the sure sign of divine favor. Do you ask what is the true religion? Look about you and see which religion is firmly established. One of the most common and most effective arguments in favor of the supernatural claims of any form of religion is the argument from its success. See, its disciples say, how it has made its way in the world, and conquered opposition. See the number of its adherents; consider for how many generations it has been accepted. What further proof of its divine origin and authority could you ask for?

This identification of the will of God with what has already been definitely established, results necessarily in bigotry. For, in order that the argument from success may seem conclusive, one must voluntarily narrow the field of his vision. It will not do to take too broad a view, or one's conclusions will be disturbed by contradictory facts. Our world must be a little one if we are to be perfectly conformed to it. Christianity is an established religion in some places, it has been wonderfully successful at some times; but Mohammedanism has been equally successful at other times and in other places. It has somehow managed to get itself established in the very lands where Christianity began. Who shall decide between them? The bigot preserves his self-satisfaction by refusing to look beyond the limits he has arbitrarily set for himself. He rules out of his thought the greater part of the actual world, and then argues from what is left as if it were the Universe. He eliminates all the discordant philosophies and theologies of mankind, and then boasts that he hears no contradiction to his dogma, and that it has been accepted always,

everywhere, and by all. This means only that it has been accepted by all to whom he has allowed a hearing. The existing world, when truly seen, is too big, it is too many-sided and perplexing, to furnish a fixed standard for our conduct ; and then there is too much wickedness in it, and there are times when we see wickedness triumphant. Is it the will of God that we should conform ourselves to this, simply because it is strong ? Conscience answers : No !

Out of this protest of the individual conscience there comes another kind of religion. The man is not satisfied with the fatalism which accepts the existing conditions as the expression of the final purpose of God. Looking within himself, he finds there something which he believes to be better. He finds there a will in opposition to the evil of the world, and he identifies that will with the will of God. The reformer and the revolutionist listen to the inner voice, and it comes to them with divine authority. When they repeat its mandates, they say, "Thus saith the Lord." They do not take counsel with flesh and blood, they resist tyranny, they go straight on in their own clearly conceived purposes, never doubting but they are thus fulfilling their mission. How strong and confident the voice is, as it sends its defiance to ancient wrong : "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up the voice like a trumpet, declare unto my people their transgressions" ! It is the same voice that startled our own nation out of its dull complacency : "I am in earnest ; I will not equivocate ; I will not excuse ; I will not retreat a single inch ; I will be heard."

This is sublime moral self-assertion. In a great crisis, where immediate action is needed, the man who can speak thus with authority is the predestined leader. God's will and his own are for the time completely identified to his

thought, for both go out to a single deed of righteousness.

But when the great emergency is over, and people are confronted with the thousand problems which are not purely moral, but which need wisdom, patience, and tolerance, as well as lofty courage, they begin to see the limitation of this kind of religion. No one man is wise enough to be the exponent of God's will on all points. He may have one authentic message, — so long as he keeps to that, he is strong; but when he attempts to go beyond this, and to settle all questions by the "Thus saith the Lord," there comes a conflict of wills. He appeals to conscience, which for him gives no uncertain sound; but why should his conscience give a truer revelation than another man's conscience? If one who identifies the will of God with the existing state of things is a bigot, he who cannot ever distinguish between God's will and his own becomes a fanatic.

Must religion, as it grows earnest, fall either into a bigotry incapable of progress or into a fanaticism impervious to reason?

I find another possibility suggested by the words of the text. That there is such a thing as the will of God, is taken for granted:

"A mystery of purpose gleaming through
The secular confusions of the world,
Whose will we darkly accomplish, doing ours."

But the will of God is not fully revealed in things as they are. It is not our duty to be conformed to this world; it may rather be our duty to protest against its standards and to destroy its most cherished forms. But nonconformity is not rebellion against God; it is obedience to him. He gives us —

“Hints of occasions infinite to keep
The soul alert with noble discontent
And onward yearnings of unstilled desire.”

For God has not finished the world ; he is transforming it into something better. And we must be transformed too ; in a growing universe we must grow. “Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” And it is by this perpetual renewal of our minds as we meet the exigencies and experiences of life, that we put ourselves in the way of “proving” — that is, testing — what the will of God is.

The bigot thinks he knows what the will of God is : it is that things should remain as they are. The fanatic thinks he knows : it is that all things should be made over according to his own plan. But this new worshipper does not make any such professions. He does not know, but he feels that it is his great work to find out. And the only way to find out is through the method of experiment, — he “will prove what the will of God is.” To this glorious experiment he gives himself, with all humility and yet with all courage.

In this quest of his he has one guiding thought, — that is, the idea of the perfect. What is the will of God ? He may not define it, but of this he is sure, — that it is nothing less than that which is “good and acceptable and perfect.”

When one's religious feeling once seizes upon the idea of the perfect, it becomes proof against all lower forms of worship. No fixed form can satisfy it, for it becomes only a symbol of something better than itself. Nowhere do we see perfection ; everywhere do we see the strife after it, the tendency toward it. This stream of tendency is the mighty current into which the soul gladly casts itself.

The will of God is not that things should remain as they are. It is that the present good should give way to something better. The will of God is not that my will should always be gratified. My will is imperfect; it must be purified and enlightened. The very meaning of experience is that I learn through failure and disappointment. I will Utopia; God wills a Kingdom of Heaven which puts my dream to shame. I will to stop when some special work has been accomplished; God wills that at the summit of to-day's achievement I shall be disturbed by the vision of a greater task that still awaits. I will a life of ease; God wills a life of service. I will a quick success; God wills that we should be made perfect through suffering.

The deep underlying faith is not in the finality of what we see or what we know. All things pass away, but the power that moves them abides. And that power moves toward the fulfilment of that which as yet is but a glorious promise. The mystery of purpose but slowly reveals itself, but we see enough to make us sure that it points to what is "good, acceptable, and perfect." To accept that will when it brings us pain, — that is resignation; to see it working in the future as in the past, is hope; to recognize it as a universal power, is faith; to make that will our own and yield to it in loving obedience, — that is the secret of perfect peace.



THE

Religious Value of Scepticism.

A SERMON

Preached in the First Parish Church, Cambridge, Mass.

BY

REV. S. M. CROTHERS.



CAMBRIDGE:

JOHN WILSON AND SON.

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THE RELIGIOUS VALUE OF SCEPTICISM.

The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going. — PROVERBS xiv. 15.

THE Bible is full of the praise of faith. Psalms and prophecies and Gospel stories are addressed to believers, and all aim to strengthen the believing habit of mind. When we look for some recognition of the value of scepticism, we must turn to the collection of those sayings which illustrate not the mystical piety but the secular wisdom of Israel. Here we have the contrast, not between faith and unbelief in the deeper religious sense, but between credulity and scepticism. The same figure is used which gave rise to the word "sceptic." The sceptic is, literally, one who looks about and examines. So here the contrast is between two travellers who set out over an unknown road. One asks the way and is content with the first answer. He takes for granted both the perfect honesty and the perfect knowledge of his adviser. He asks no more questions and takes no further precautions. He believes every word that is said to him. The other is not so sure of it. The road is a perilous one, and the information about it is not satisfactory. He listens to what people tell him, but he draws his own conclusions. He is ready to ask advice, but

he takes only so much as seems good to him. He determines to go on, but he will keep his eyes open, and "look well to his going." The imprudent man, the proverb says, is credulous; the prudent man is sceptical.

I have said that this contrast between credulity and scepticism is different from the question between faith and unbelief, when these words are used in a deeply religious sense. Let me try to make plain what I mean.

The word "faith," like all great words that have had a history, has more than one sense. It means different things to different persons. Indeed, some of the definitions which follow one another in the dictionary are directly contradictory. Here is one: "Faith is firm belief based on confidence in the authority and veracity of another, rather than on one's own knowledge, reason, or judgment." Then follows the definition of Frederick Robertson: "Faith is that which, when the probabilities are equal, ventures on God's side and on the side of right, on the guarantee of something within which makes the thing seem true because loved." Still further on comes the definition of Matthew Arnold to the same effect: "Faith is the being able to cleave to the power of goodness appealing to our higher and real self, not to the lower and apparent self." It is evident that the one use of the word stands in complete opposition to the other. Confidence in the infallibility of an external authority is one thing; confidence in a goodness which one has personally experienced is an altogether different thing. This latter is what seems to me the more deeply religious sense, and the one which fulfils the New Testament phrase, "faith wrought by love." Faith, in this sense, is not the assent to any special

proposition; it is in its nature moral and spiritual; it is faithfulness, loyalty.

Now, it is evident that the idea that stands in opposition to this is not scepticism, which concerns a process of the intellect, but unfaithfulness, which concerns the character. From the same root with the word "sceptic" comes our English word "spy." The sceptic is one who goes boldly forth to spy out the land. But though the spy wanders far from his own camp, he is not to be confounded with the deserter; for he may be impelled by the most self-sacrificing loyalty.

When we identify religion with the easy acceptance of some opinion, with the habit of believing whatever is told us, we not only narrow its scope, but we discredit its reality. For the ages of this kind of faith have always been ages of ignorance. The undeveloped mind takes everything for granted; the awakened intelligence doubts, questions, puts everything to the test. If religion is dependent on the ability to believe without investigation, then religion is decadent, and lingers only as a survival of an earlier stage of culture. The modern mind refuses to be cajoled or coerced into the idea that some intellectual processes are intrinsically praiseworthy, and that others are intrinsically culpable. It asserts that it is just as right for one to doubt what is doubtful as it is to believe what is credible; and we must confess that our material and intellectual progress has depended on the use of this large liberty.

Just here comes the bold assertion of liberal religion. It declares that not only our material and intellectual progress, but also our spiritual progress, depends on this free exercise of all our powers. Religion is indebted to the great doubters as well as to the great believers; indeed, the great believers have been them-

selves great doubters also. They have not "believed every word," but they "have looked well to their going."

We may see how belief and doubt, instead of being mutually exclusive terms, work together, when we consider any achievement. You go across the continent by railway. Think what it means to pass safely over three thousand miles of iron track. Day and night you are whirled onward, over rivers, through cities, across plains and mountains. You sleep and wake, trusting yourself to a mechanism which you do not yourself control. From one point of view such a journey is a triumph of the principle of faith. All these complicated processes and adjustments are possible only to believers. The bridge-builder must believe in his own calculations and in the strength of his materials; the managers of one system must believe in the good faith of those of another; the engineer must believe in the telegraph operator and obey instructions.

That is one side, but it is equally true that it is a triumph also of patient and persistent scepticism. Faith there has been, but not a blind faith. You cross the continent in safety, because from one ocean to the other nothing essential to your safety has been taken for granted. Had there been a single bridge whose venerable timbers had been held too sacred to be investigated; had there been a single engineer who had assumed that the signals were right, instead of making sure that they were right; had there been a single train despatcher who gave orders according to last year's timetable, because it was trustworthy once, — there would have been instant disaster. You have been safe because hundreds of intent, scrutinizing eyes have been doubtful, and therefore watchful. As the train stops in the night,

you hear the tapping of hammers on the wheels. Those wheels have come for many miles; why not trust them for the rest of the journey? Yes, the answer is, trust them we will, when once more we have tested them. And so the two things go on, the testing and the trusting, and only that is trusted fully which has been tested thoroughly, for only that is trustworthy.

Now, in the normal development of religion these two processes go on in the same way, side by side. Instead of the religious attitude being that in which everything is accepted without question, it is rather true that religion itself is a question and a challenge.

How is it about worship? Worship grows out of wonder, and wonder implies doubt. A man doubts himself; he sees something which he cannot fully explain or comprehend. He is overawed by an inscrutable reality in whose presence he stands; and he bows down in reverence before it. But why is the genuine feeling of worship so rare among us, so that many people go through life without being touched by it? It is because they are in the habit of taking everything for granted. They accept the universe without question, and therefore without emotion. For everything that happens there is a sufficient answer, — "it is in the nature of things," — of course the world exists, and it must have its laws and forces, and things must be related to each other in some fashion, and of course we are here to see it all and to criticise it. But as for anything wonderful, we have n't seen it. If only we could believe some of the stories of miracles, then we might have a proof of the being of God.

And then comes one who cannot take all that he sees and experiences as a mere matter of course. He begins to question. Why should anything exist? And if

anything exists, why should it be orderly rather than chaotic? Why should the movements of atoms result in worlds and systems? Why should they move at all? Against the background of possible nothingness, there flashes the miracle of existence. And there is more than mere existence, there is life, that by strange processes organizes matter into amazing combinations. And then wonder succeeds wonder; life grows conscious of itself, and of the universe out of which it came. "I stand here," the man says; "I think, I feel, I love, I aspire. What does all this mean? Is this a mere matter of course?"

No; it is a supreme wonder, and out of the wonder grows worship for the Divine power out of which all this came.

When we think of religion as beginning with the acceptance of certain doctrines which have been set forth with authority, we make the mistake of treating the answer as if it went before the question. Religious dogmas have been the answers which from time to time have been given to religious questions. The significant thing, that which proves that man is a religious being, is not that certain answers have been accepted, but that the questions instinctively arise, and that men are not satisfied with superficial answers.

What are the great books of religion, those which have power to stimulate the soul and make it conscious of its high calling? Would any man turn to those ambitious "Bodies of Divinity" in which were formulated the rigid systems which have been proclaimed as final expressions of truth? To what books of the Old Testament do people turn most naturally? They go to the Psalms, which are full of passion and aspiration, but where faith is very often perplexed, and where the

sweet voice of hope is heard by those who are still walking in the shadow. They turn to the book of Job, which is full of the questioning of life and destiny. Job does not accept the pious counsel of his friends; he refuses to believe what is told him, and yet the teaching of the book is that his, after all, was the religious position.

By almost universal assent Tennyson's "In Memoriam" would be placed among the most religious books of our century; and yet nothing could be less dogmatic in its method and spirit. The poet ministers to the spiritual needs, not by giving final answers, but by making us feel how infinitely suggestive are the questions which the soul continually asks.

"If these brief lays, of sorrow born,
Were taken to be such as closed
Grave doubts and answers here proposed,
Then were they such as men might scorn.

"Her care is not to part and prove :
She takes, when harsher moods remit,
What slender shade of doubt may flit,
And makes it vassal unto love."

When we talk of the sceptical tendency of our time, let us not jump at the conclusion that this means a tendency to unspiritual thought and feeling. We must remember that it is possible that doubt may be made "vassal unto love."

And here we come to the very heart of the matter. Those who look upon doubt as necessarily the enemy of religion, assume that it is the spiritual interpretation of things that is most open to its attacks. A little thought will show us that it is the unspiritual interpretation that men have most persistently doubted. Dog-

matic irreligion suffers much more severely from critical investigation than does even the crudest form of dogmatic religion. Men are incredulous of atheism and of materialism, and this incredulity becomes more intense as thought becomes more active. Any theory of the universe is more readily accepted than one which denies an adequate cause for it, and which leaves no room for hope for a worthy destiny. There have been schemes of Positive Philosophy which defined narrowly the limits of human thought and aspiration. Within the realm of things known, it was taught, we may move as we will, but let no man dare to look beyond. What we know is all there is, or at least all there is that is of any importance to us. We may trace the relations between things, but we must not ask about their causes; we may consider their present tendencies, but must not inquire into their real purpose; we must be content with what we can distinctly comprehend.

But such a Positive Philosophy cannot withstand the solvent of doubt. That which dissolves it is the kind of doubt to which Wordsworth refers, --

“Those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings,
Blank misgivings of a creature
Moving about in worlds not realized.”

That man's thought is very superficial who does not perceive that it is the outward world, and not the inner reality of thought, that is most open to doubt. We talk of facts being stubborn things, but facts are not as stubborn as thought. The only way in which we can prove the existence of the world is by the appeal to our consciousness. Because this is so, because thought is for us the ultimate reality, we cannot be content to

treat it as a mere accident. When any outward fact presents itself as a finality, then begin those "obstinate questionings."

What has, to the outward view, more the air of finality than the fact of death? Nature seems to say, Here is the end. And yet, standing by the open grave, men have refused to accept it as final. It is their obstinate questioning of what is seen that has led them to trust in what is unseen. That was the attitude of Socrates in regard to death. Other men said, "Here is the conclusion of the whole matter: life ends with the breath." We see Socrates listening, as he had so often listened before, to people who were confident that reality ended with their knowledge of it. Socrates answers, in effect: "I doubt it." This doubt of mortality is the way by which many come to the faith in immortality. It doubtless is true that to-day there is less tendency than in the past to dogmatize about the conditions of future existence; but is it not equally true that the reasons for doubting the mortality of the spirit are growing stronger?

The modern mind is sceptical of appearances, and refuses to accept them as final. This tendency is destructive of the claims of churches and creeds to infallibility, and because of this it seems irreligious.

But what is this doubt of appearances but the search after reality? He who makes the discovery that "all forms are fugitive," is close upon the other discovery that "substances survive." The refusal of the awakened mind to accept what it sees as final, — what is this but another way of saying that it becomes conscious that the reality which confronts it is infinite?

To this consciousness that we stand in the presence of the Infinite, we are brought slowly and painfully by

the doubting intellect. It has scrutinized the path; it has stopped before doors that for the time seemed to shut out hope of further progress; but door after door has opened, until at last it cries wonderingly: "End there is none to the Universe of God; lo, also, there is no beginning." The thinking man has ceased to believe in the limits which were once set for matter and force. He has learned that the energy which to first appearances seemed spent in a single action, in reality persists, and that not an atom can be proved to have perished. He has ceased to believe in the immutability of those forms which once seemed to limit so severely the manifestation of life. Life is greater than any of the forms in which it, from time to time, manifests itself. He is coming to feel that the limitations to spiritual power which once were accepted will not stand examination. No man has ever traced the boundaries of thought, any more than he has traced the boundaries of matter. No man in his reasoning or his imagination has exhausted the possibilities of the soul. We are in the presence not merely of a material, but also of a spiritual infinitude.

Coming to this point, the doubting intellect finds an altar waiting for it, and the possibility of faith.

"When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" This question, which has lost its first Messianic meaning, comes again in a larger but not less urgent sense. When man comes to the maturity of his powers and to the large freedom of his thought, shall there still be in him the element of faith?

If by faith we mean the blind acceptance of this or that opinion on the unquestioned authority of others, if we mean implicit reliance on the insight of the past, we must answer, No.

But if we mean the willingness to "venture on God's side and on the side of right, on the guarantee of something within which makes the thing seem true because loved," then we must answer most heartily, Yes. For the inward guarantee becomes stronger, just as the whole nature is fully developed. As the affections become purified, they become more trustworthy. What may one trust if not "that which is likest God within the soul"? What the good and wise man loves, he may well accept as a guide to truth. Truth is infinite; faith is the power, not to comprehend it fully, but to point toward it, and loyally to follow it. Such faith grows more necessary as the horizons of thought enlarge, and it becomes more sure as the character is disciplined and ennobled by unselfish service.





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FORTNIGHTLY SERMONS.

THE

Law of Religious Brotherhood.

A SERMON

Preached in the First Parish Church, Cambridge, Mass.

BY

REV. S. M. CROTHERS.



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THE LAW OF RELIGIOUS BROTHERHOOD.

Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good,
unto edifying. — ROMANS XV. 2.

PAUL is here interested in the same problem which confronts us to-day; he is trying to find a way to build up a real religious brotherhood upon the earth, — a brotherhood not in name, but in deed; a fraternity, warm, loving, and practical, — and he tells us what is necessary for the formation of such a brotherhood. He first tells us the aim of this new brotherhood, — an aim which, in that day, and in this day as well, may be described as being revolutionary; for it implied a revolution, not so much in the outer as in the inner world, a complete change from the ordinary way of looking at things.

The aim of this brotherhood is an ideal one. He does not propose, he tells us, to teach people any more how they may conform to the existing world, but how they may be transformed in their minds so as to be fit for a better society.

Then he comes to the method of this religious brotherhood, and we are surprised when we remember how, through so many ages, the Church has relied upon

the principle of external authority, to find here, at the very beginning, so clearly stated the method of perfect freedom. He calls upon all believers to come out into the sunlight. Religion, he says, has too long dwelt in the obscure places; henceforth it must find its best defence in perfect light. "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light." "Let us walk honestly, as in the day."

Now, if people are to walk together honestly, it follows that there must be a large tolerance in this new brotherhood. And so he devotes a whole chapter to explaining this principle of tolerance. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations."

There shall be no room for petty scruples or prejudices to divide those who ought to walk together. "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

It is then that he comes to the social law of the religious brotherhood, the tie that must forever bind it together; and he touches upon the relation which the members must bear to one another, and he thus defines it: "Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good, unto edifying."

I said that the problem proposed is the same that we have to solve to-day, and I wish this morning to indicate how this principle of the religious brotherhood comes to us of the liberal faith. Though among the churches of Christendom we have long proclaimed the breadth of religious fellowship, I fancy that practi-

cally it is as hard for us as it has been for any others to make it a reality.

It is necessary for us to look into our own history, and to see the way in which the brotherly side of religion has had to struggle with great difficulties. Our religious life and our religious organization have been inherited from a type of religion which was in its essence, I think, unsocial. Looked at from the standpoint of individual piety, we may go far before we can find any higher examples of real Christianity than those we find in the older Puritanism, — that culmination of Protestant movement in our own land. And yet, when we go farther than the individual life, and ask in regard to the brotherly side, the principle of fraternity, we find that there was something at the very heart of that elder Puritanism which prevented its full perfection and growth. The principle underlying this austere religion may be stated thus: Man must please God and serve him, but beyond that he must neither please himself nor his neighbor.

The moral law was a stern requirement which came directly to the individual soul. Each man was held responsible for his own act and his own thought, and could not put that responsibility on the general public around him. He worked under a great Task-master's eye; he was to be judged by Him at the last Great Day for every idle word that he might speak.

And no wonder that the effect of that thought was to make men draw apart with a certain suspicion of their fellow-men; for in their highest moments, and in their best obedience, they were alone. Alone with God, they came to distrust everything which either pleased themselves or pleased their neighbors.

We have in the "Pilgrim's Progress" a picture of

this kind of piety in its relation to the principle of fellowship. We are told how, coming out of the dark valley, Christian went on alone upon his path, and Bunyan says: "Now as Christian went on his way, he came to a little ascent, which was cast up on purpose that pilgrims might see before them. Up, therefore, Christian went, and looking forward, he saw Faithful before him upon his journey. Then said Christian aloud, 'Ho! ho! soho! stay, and I will be your companion.' At that, Faithful looked behind him; to whom Christian cried again, 'Stay, stay, till I come up to you!' But Faithful answered, 'No, I am upon my life, and the avenger of blood is behind us.' "

No time for those who were fleeing from the "City of Destruction," those who were conscious of temptation on every hand, those who felt the avenger of blood was behind; no time for the pleasure of social intercourse upon the way. Such companionship as there was only emphasized the unsocial element of this austere type of religion; for it was the companionship only of the elect souls.

By and by Christian comes up to Faithful, and "Then I saw in my dream, they went very lovingly on together, and had sweet discourse of all things that had happened to them in their pilgrimage."

If they could each be sure of the other's high calling, then they could walk together, and have sweet intercourse; but it was throughout a struggle, this communion of saints. There was no place, in their thought of religion, for that freer human fellowship, that communion with saints and sinners alike, which makes the charm of the Gospels, as we read how Jesus ate with publicans and with sinners, and was glad to be known as their friend.

The time came when the Puritan theology became incredible to many. It seemed as if a dark cloud had passed away; no longer the anger of God above, no longer the avenger of blood behind. Men awakened to liberty, — the liberty of the mind, and the liberty of the spirit. It was possible, they began to see, to live a true life and yet find enjoyment. "I may think as I please, I may believe as I please;" and out of this new affirmation of liberty came our present type of Christianity. Born out of this desire for freedom, it has its good side and its evil side. If I were to point out the limitations of what we call "liberal Christianity," I should say that it has too often been content with throwing away the old formula, — A man may rightly please neither himself nor his neighbor; and then accepting as its new Gospel, — Every man may rightly please himself.

To the baser sort of minds this new liberty means no religion at all. To the finer sort of minds, to those who have inherited the best traditions of the past, and those whose instincts are spiritual, this produces a beautiful type of individual religion. The worshipper says: "It pleases me to worship God in spirit and in truth; it pleases me to meet together with those like-minded in some free form of worship; it pleases me to speak the truth, and to speak it in my own way.

There is room here for very fine development of individual character, and this type of religion has never fallen short here; and yet, I think we are coming to be conscious that this is not enough, that there are mighty dangers and difficulties besetting our nation and the world which demand united effort. A man has some mission to his fellows; for as it is not his only work

to save his own soul from some "City of Destruction," so it is not his only work to cultivate his own soul in the higher things.

Again the sense of friendliness, the desire for closer co-operation and larger activity, comes to us, and with it comes a certain sense of weakness and inexperience in those things which we begin to see are well worth while.

You bring together a company of the most excellent people in the world, and appeal to them simply as individuals, and you lack that aggressive element which alone can conquer the evil of the world. The man who has learned only to please himself fails, where the God-consecrated missionary of an austere creed succeeds. The missionary of the austere creed goes forth not to please himself; he speaks some harsh word, which he knows will be offensive to those who hear him, — it is equally offensive to himself as a natural man, — but he goes forth with a great burden, crying, "Thus saith the Lord: I come not to please you, not to please myself; I come to please God only." But suppose one goes forth to whom, after all, the supreme thing is a sort of spiritual good taste, who has only certain things that to him are admirable and beautiful. When he speaks to others of these things there comes a conflict of personalities, — Your private conscience, they say to him, is trying to lord it over our private consciences. Or, worse still, your little private conscience, your sense of propriety, is attempting to legislate for the public good, of which you know nothing. You are moral, you are religious, you are philanthropic, because you like to be that way; you enjoy the fine moral pleasure. But we enjoy another kind of pleasure. We are amply able to take care of ourselves, and do not care to have your

help in those things for which, after all, you are unfitted.

Malvolio likes to have a quiet household, he has a fine sense of what is proper; he will have no riotous conduct there; he chooses to be virtuous, and he would have his choice made the rule of the house. But there are others in the household who do not think that way at all, and the weakness of his position is pointed out in the words, "Sick of self-love, Malvolio." The self-centred saint may care well for himself, but he is not, for all his sainthood, large enough to give laws for the world in which he lives.

And so we come, and I believe that the religious world is coming to-day, to see the necessity for the social type of religion. Sympathy is coming to be emphasized. It is seen that the Church must find out how the world actually lives before it can help the world. The real saviours of humanity must be those who have entered most heartily into the common life. The present emphasis is upon the sympathetic qualities; and this is well. Everywhere altruism is being preached. We have come to the era of conciliation; and people of different creeds fraternize, and find the differences between them not so great as they had imagined. But just because of this we need to be on our guard lest this good feeling may end in weakness, and our sympathy with others prevent us from giving sincere expression to our own thought.

There is a tendency to forget the saving clause, and to say, "Let every one of us please his neighbor," as if that were the whole law. We hear people who speak, not out of the convictions of their own hearts, but out of an amiable desire to gratify others. Such voices are at best only echoes. In religion we have a latitudina-

rianism which studiously avoids any difficult questions, and in seeking to please others, fails in any strong or clear expression of itself.

But in the words which I have chosen as expressing the law of the religious brotherhood, this weakness is avoided, and in the only way in which it can be avoided, — by setting before us an ideal purpose.

“Let every one of us,” says Paul, “please his neighbor *in that which is good for edifying*,” — that is, for building up that higher life which belongs to all of us alike.

If we grasp this idea, we are saved from weakness, saved from insincerity; but at the same time we have a sense of belonging to a great brotherhood. This is the thought that long ago Saint Augustine gave us.

He said, “Let no one trouble me by saying, ‘Moses thought *not* as *you* say, but as *I* say. . . . O Lord, thy truth is neither mine nor his nor another’s, but of all of us whom thou publicly calledst to have it in common, warning us not to hold it especially for ourselves, lest we be deprived of it.”

This seems to me the law of the religious brotherhood, the law in regard to thought, the law in regard to action. However it may be with worldly goods, the high things of the spirit, if they are to be held at all, must be held as common property. We must come to see that we may not impose our idiosyncrasies upon another; nor on the other hand may we treat truth as if it could be monopolized by ourselves.

The truth that is simply mine is no truth for the world. But coming to see this, we shall see more and more that there are truths and duties which are of no private interpretation, but which belong to us all alike.

The church is a community consecrated to the service

of those true things that belong to us all. When once we come to see what these true things are, and how they appeal to every man's conscience, then it is possible to have a church which shall indeed belong to all souls. Religion in it will be popularized without being vulgarized. In such a church there will be no question from any member — What do I like? What pleases me? Such questions will be seen at once to be altogether irrelevant. The only question is, What is that good thing for which this brotherhood is established? What are those true means by which it may be built up? And then each man, looking at his neighbor, will ask, How does it please you to work with me for these high aims? And he must so respect his neighbor that he will in his heart believe that his neighbor is truly pleased only by the best things. He will not be gratified by flattery, nor by any weak compromise.

His neighbor will be pleased only by his sincerest and bravest words and deeds.

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FORTNIGHTLY SERMONS.

On the Study of the Bible.

A SERMON

Preached in the First Parish Church, Cambridge, Mass.

BY

REV. S. M. CROTHERS.



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CAMBRIDGE:

JOHN WILSON AND SON.

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1896.

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ON THE STUDY OF THE BIBLE.

For whatsoever things were written aforetimes, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. — ROMANS xv. 4.

No revolution in thought is more startling than that which has taken place in regard to the Bible. What is the Bible? The traditional answer, which the founders of our great Protestant churches accepted, had the advantage of being simple and direct. The Westminster Confession, in carefully chosen language, declared: "It pleased the Lord at sundry times and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare His will unto His people, and afterward for the better preserving and propagating of the truth to commit the same wholly unto writing. The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or may by good and necessary inference be deduced from Scripture, unto which nothing is at any time to be added, either by new revelations of the Spirit or by traditions of men."

According to this theory the Bible is a book altogether free from error, written by God Himself, through the agency of certain favored saints. It is no wonder that so long as this opinion was received without question,

the Bible was the most interesting thing in the world. Those textual discussions which to us seem so dry were once full of most intense life. The study of the universe could not compare with the study of the Scriptures. God indeed had made the universe, but it was vast and perplexing, full of contradictions. The universe was a puzzle; but in the Bible God had given us the key to it. Would we get at the essential truth concerning our own origin and destiny, here we might find it written down in infallible words. There was no need to urge people to search the Scriptures. Such a mine of rich ore, or rather such a treasure house full of the unalloyed gold of truth, it would be the most transparent folly to neglect.

But all this has been changed. The Bible stood against the attacks of its enemies; but the theory of its infallibility has been undermined through the patient investigations of its friends. No pious sophistry can conceal the plain fact that a book in which unmistakable errors have been discovered cannot be infallible. Marks of human limitation appear everywhere. The theory of a book miraculously perfect in all its parts breaks down. The present tendency of the defenders of the old doctrine is to assert infallibility only in regard to what cannot be tested. The Scriptures, as we now have them, we are told, may contain errors, but we are bidden to believe that the original manuscripts were inerrant. A more absurd refuge for a discredited dogma could scarcely be imagined.

But what remains of the Bible when the doctrine of its miraculous origin and authority is given up? Many people throw it aside altogether. This is natural enough. In the church of the Latter Day Saints, the Book of Mormon is accepted as a direct revelation from God, and

is studied reverently; but when one comes to disbelieve the story of its origin, the book is thrown aside. The reason is that it has in itself no value. But is this true in regard to the Bible?

The verdict of the most competent critics is that it is not true. They find an intrinsic value, which makes it altogether independent of the stamp which the Church has put upon it. After all deductions have been made we must admit that there is that in these writings which still challenges the attention of the world.

Let us frankly admit the human limitations. The Bible is a human book and had a natural growth. But unless we have a very poor idea of humanity, this will not make us turn away with contempt. We may here see the diviner side of humanity. We may see it struggling upward through its ignorance and its sin into a purer air. We may hear its song of triumph as it catches sight of its far-off goal.

The Bible is the literature of a little nation; but it was a nation with a peculiar genius for religion. Within the narrower limits of the ancient world the life of a nation sometimes turned in one direction, and produced masterpieces which later ages have not equalled. Many have been the advances in knowledge since the days of Plato, but our busy, many-sided modern life has found no substitute for the great works and great thoughts of Greece. The fire still burns on the old altars, and thither pilgrims go to light their torches. Such fire remains also on the ancient altars of Israel.

What may one expect to find in the Bible? If he expects a final answer to every question he will be disappointed. What he may find is a vivid record of the growth of religion, — a record written “at sundry times and in divers manners,” but always with power. It is

the story of religious development given by eye-witnesses of the progress.

He may find traditions of remote antiquity, glimpses of holy men, seen through mists, walking with God along the far mountain summits of time. Perhaps he may hear words of lofty cheer from those who had not yet lost "the large utterance of the early gods." Tracing the history, he may learn, not simply how individuals but how nations grow into spiritual life and faith; how from crudest nature-worship they grow into the thought of God as the "high and lofty one who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy;" how through ages of patient endurance the thought grows tenderer, until at last the Eternal, who loves righteousness, becomes also the Father, who loves even his most sinful children. Here one may watch the growth of ideals of human greatness as the procession passes down the ages. Nomadic chieftains, wandering over the deserts and building altars by the way; border warriors lifting hands yet red with blood in prayer to their tribal God; oriental despots, passionate, vindictive, yet with a not unreal halo of sainthood around their heads; wild eyed hermits, issuing from the fastnesses of the rock and pronouncing the doom of princes with a stern "Thus saith the Lord;" preachers of righteousness, denouncing alike the evils of temple and court and market-place, and declaring a God who despised burnt offerings and sought only the contrite heart; exiles in a far country, dreaming of the new king and the better country. At last, in the fulness of time, through numberless disappointments, the old ideals of earthly glory fade away and the nation comes to recognize a new order of excellence—the excellency of a manhood clothed with humility and crowned with suffering, as Israel finds its

highest ideal in "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

Here one may meet with almost every phase of individual experience. Israel had no genius for abstract philosophy. There was no Academy in Jerusalem, no Plato, no Aristotle.^a But for life-philosophy, the results wrought out by the personal struggles of men left alone with their own sorrows and seeking a way out of them, I know not where we can find a parallel to these Scriptures. "No man without trials and temptations," said Luther, "can attain to a true understanding of the Holy Scriptures." It needs not so much critical scholarship as personal experience, to interpret these tragedies of the soul.

We talk of the simplicity of the Greek drama, with its few actors and its relentless unfolding of destiny. But simpler still is the Hebrew drama. In Job we see the stricken sufferer and his would-be comforters facing the unsolved problem of sorrow, with only the passionless calm of the desert for a background; until from the whirlwind comes the voice of the Eternal rebuking alike the wild repining of the sufferer and the cold consolations of his friends.

In the book of Ecclesiastes we may study the workings of the mind of an oriental sceptic. He doubts whether life is good; he has no faith in immortality, nor in human wisdom, nor in any lasting success. But in the storm of doubt his soul is held by one anchor, his conviction that there is a God. He is a deist, and his conviction, though too colorless to greatly cheer him, at least keeps him from absolute despair. "Let us not be overmuch wise," he says, "nor overmuch righteous;" but after all there is a God, and it is better to keep his commandments.

How like a step into the sunlight it is to come out of the dark, close room, where the world-weary philosopher sits brooding, into the temple courts where we hear the sweet assurance of the Psalms, or into the market places where the listeners are thrilled by the generous ardor of the prophets. Here, indeed, are words brimming over with eternal life. Nations come and go, but the songs sung on the Judean hills, centuries before the Cæsars, have not lost their power to make melody in the heart. They never grow obsolete, these

“Swallow flights of song that dip
Their wings in tears, and skim away.”

Nor, while there are rulers who refuse to do justice, and there are rich men who grind the faces of the poor, and the multitude prefers private gain to the public good, will the prophets become obsolete. Still we hear them crying as of old against false princes, and false priests, and false people: “Thou art a land that is not cleansed; her priests have violated my law and profaned my holy things; her princes in the midst of her are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, and to get dishonest gain. The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and vexed the poor and needy; yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully.”

When all goes well, and we are at ease in our little Zions, these writings seem enigmatical, but in times of moral awakening men instinctively turn to them and understand them. So Jesus at the beginning of his ministry turned to the prophet who wrote of the glad tidings to the poor. So in the midst of Roman persecution a half-frenzied Christian heard over the new Babylon of the West the prophetic doom upon an un-

righteous civilization, and cried exultingly: "Babylon is fallen! is fallen!" So to the prophets Chrysostom turned when he would rebuke the corruption of the Eastern Empire; and Savonarola when he would bring fickle Florence to repentance; and the old words came unsought to Theodore Parker as he saw the lava torrent of wrath, uncooled by the ages, rolling down upon all oppressors.

Were the prophecies fulfilled? Yes, a thousand times. As often as the justice of the universe is vindicated and the refuges of lies swept away, as often as a new word of cheer comes to the poor, so often it can be said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." In the new experience the old words live again, and we realize

From what agonies of heart and brain,
What exultations trampling on despair,
What tenderness, what tears, what hate of wrong,

they came.

Such are the Scriptures, the records of a gifted race in its search after God, a literature whose central thoughts are righteousness and worship. We cannot neglect them without loss to ourselves. The Bible must take its place as a part of the world's literature, but we may be sure that it will be a high place. No serious criticism has affected the estimate of its intrinsic value. The flippant jests of those who treat it with scorn have influence only with those who are ignorant of its real history.

Was the Bible inspired? Our answer must depend on what is meant by inspiration. One who believes that every good gift is from above, and that the unfolding of intelligence is itself a revelation, is not averse to the

idea of inspiration which the author of the Wisdom of Solomon gives: "I myself am a mortal man like to all. . . . I called upon God and the spirit of Wisdom came to me. I loved her above strength and beauty. . . . For Wisdom is more moving than any motion. She is the breath of the power of God, a pure influence from the glory of the Almighty. She is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God and the image of his goodness. She maketh all things new, and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God and prophets."

We cannot, in our thought, confine this influence to the Bible, but we can hardly fail to recognize it there.

As you read, do you come in contact with men who loved wisdom more than health or beauty? In the words of the prophets do you feel breaths of power sweeping down upon you from sublime heights? In the eyes of heroes of the antique world do you see the brightness of the everlasting light? In some sweet psalm do you find new and nobler meanings till you are sure that you are looking into the depths of a serene soul that has become a "mirror of the power of God and the image of his goodness?" Then theories of inspiration will not trouble you, for you already have the fact of which the theories have been attempted explanations.

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The Reformer's True Power.

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THE REFORMER'S TRUE POWER.

He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul.

PROVERBS viii. 36.

It goes without saying that the man who, instead of flattering the weaknesses of his own time, seeks to do away with them, has undertaken no easy task. The reformer who calls things by their right names must expect opposition from those whom he rebukes. But often what, under any circumstances, is a hard work, becomes harder, because he goes about it in the wrong way. To the natural opposition to his principles is added antagonism, aroused by his method.

A man looking upon his neighbor's actions discerns a fault. Indignantly he berates the sinner for his sin, and yet his attacks seem to have little effect. He has the courage of his convictions, but he fails, because he is trying to do for his neighbor what his neighbor must do for himself. He offends where he might have persuaded. The fact which we always must keep in mind is that the will of each individual is sovereign within its own sphere. Argument, satire, invective, are the shot and shell which may drive it from the open field; but when it retreats behind the bulwarks of personality it is secure.

The sinner hardens his heart, and begins to justify himself. What right, he asks, has any one to pass judgment on my motives? What does my accuser know about the real state of my soul? Wherein is he my superior, and what right has he to dictate as to my conduct? It is the same kind of feeling which makes the people of any nation resent foreign criticism. We may speak ever so strongly against the imperfections of our own society, but we don't like the foreigner to say the same things about us. When he begins to accuse, we instinctively put ourselves on the defensive. This is doubtless a weakness of human nature, but it is a weakness of which we must take account. We cannot make much head against wrong-doing so long as we allow ourselves to appear as foreigners, criticising an evil with which we ourselves have nothing to do.

But there is another way possible. We may attack an evil not from without, but from within. We may have such sympathy with the sinner that he will welcome us when we help him to fight against the sin that "so easily besets him." This is the secret of persuasion. A man who speaks from the outside, tries to impose upon his neighbor a standard of judgment which he is not ready to accept; and he treats his neighbor's acts as a sin against that standard.

But the true rebuke comes when one shows not an external standard, but reveals one that is within, but which has, thus far, been forgotten. The real sin is against the sinner's own soul, — against the law already written there. There is a right way of life and a wrong way of life for each one of us. To forsake the right way brings injury to others; but the first and most lasting injury is to ourselves. Those who love us are the first to see this hurt, and because they love us

they should be the first to tell us of it. If we would convince another man of his fault, we must first put ourselves in his place; we must understand his powers, we must recognize his limitations, and we must discern his possibilities. Then for the first time are we able to tell what his fault is, for it is measured by the extent to which his performance fell short of his possibilities. Then we may say to him: See what a worthy thing you might have done. To have done that would have been to have expressed your own best thought; it would have brought out what was truest in your own nature. Here is an opportunity lost, a wrong done to yourself.

Those who have spoken most effectively against moral evil have not been the satirists or the cynics who have painted life as all black. Men have looked on their repellent pictures and gone on living as before. It is all bad, but, such as it is, it must be accepted. There is no help for it; at least no help is pointed out. But another man comes, with a heart full of love, and with a great hope in the possibilities of the soul. He is no stranger to the folly and the sin of humanity, but he knows that there are forces strong enough to overcome them. He does not stand aloof; he has learned to say "we" instead of "you." We have, he says, missed our path, but we will seek it again. We have sinned against our own souls, but now we repent. Let us take courage and go on together in a better way.

In this way one must treat the sins of appetite and passion. Here it is always true that the sinner and the victim are one. The man who has allowed his appetites to pass beyond his own control is not their only victim, but he is the first. He is becoming weak where he might have been strong; he will lose self-respect even

before he loses the respect of others. Here is a citadel whose garrison is mutinous. It will do no good to bombard it from a distance. The governing power is in need of reinforcements, and it is in friendliness and not with the appearance of hostility that one must come. Often there is need of doing more than to bring reinforcements to the citadel; there is need of provisions as well. The garrison has been mutinous because it has been half starved. A student of the problem of intemperance, speaking of the drunkard's craving for strong drink, says: "What Nature really craves is not alcohol, but food, fresh air, and the proper conditions of life." It is evident that something more than criticism is here needed. Harsh judgment does not help the situation. The starved nature needs wholesome food; the perverted tastes need to be turned again in the right direction. He who is the real helper not only sees what is abnormal in the actual condition, but he also sees what the man may be when restored to normal life. One cannot do much to save another unless he sees in him something worth saving.

With sins of guile we are apt to be less patient, but here also it is true that the sinner wrongs his own soul. The wrong is not less great because he does not at first realize it. He who tries to deceive others cheats himself; the impostor is also a dupe. He becomes involved in false conditions of his own creating, until after a while he wanders about in utter bewilderment. How often we see people who have become incapable of clear moral judgments! They have tampered with conscience so often that it no longer points true. They have no clear and positive leading ideas; they have ceased to be people of integrity. The word "integrity" means wholeness, completeness. The man of integrity is

one who, as we say, "is all there." His character stands four-square; we know what to depend upon. Deceit eats away the very substance of the character and leaves only the semblance.

The plea for honesty in word and deed is the plea to each man to be true to himself. There is something in him that is worth bringing out; what he actually is, is of vastly more importance than what he pretends to be. Any one who in a straightforward way tells what he thinks is worth listening to; but the words of the cleverest man lose power and point when he begins to prevaricate.

The reformer of any institution must learn the same lesson which is learned by any one who becomes a helper of an individual. He must come as a friend and not as an enemy; he must work from within and not from without. Every institution has some ultimate purpose, some reason for its existence. If this purpose is in its very nature evil, then, of course, there is nothing to do but to denounce it and to attempt to destroy it. This is not the work of the reformer, but of the iconoclast. But there are very few institutions of this kind. Most of them began in an honest attempt to do something for human welfare. The attempt may have been a feeble one, and the better elements may have long since been overlaid with all manner of corruptions. The true reformer sees the evils, but he also sees the good of which they are the perversions. He is quick to seize upon even the faintest suggestion of nobility, by which he may rebuke the actual sordidness. This, he says, is what it was meant to be, but is not. Here is the soul of the movement; see how far it has fallen short of adequate expression.

Are there evils in the State? The reformer is not the

cold Pharisee who points them out with the air of one who is holier than those about him. No! he is most fervently and devotedly a patriot when he lifts up his voice against national sins. It is because he loves his country and is proud of its true greatness that he feels so keenly any disgrace that comes to it. He is patriotic enough to see that no nation is disgraced by the action of open enemies, but by the decadence of its own citizens. One who would effectively rebuke the sins of America must first become truly American. He must love the America of Washington, of Franklin, of Lincoln, the home of personal freedom, social equality, political righteousness. Then he will resent any infringement on the rights of the lowliest citizen as an attack on the flag he loves. He will turn away from the demagogue as from one whose empty speech profanes the great names he invokes. The rich man who uses his wealth to influence legislation or to change the natural course of the administration of the law is seen to be as deadly an enemy of his country as though he had hired a band of foreign mercenaries to attack it by force of arms.

Are there evils in the church? One who would earn the right to rebuke them, and gain the power to reform, must love the church, and appreciate how noble an end it has in view. No flippant criticism of an avowed enemy can have the force which belongs to the sorrowful confession of a friend. To present clearly the essence of religion is to bring the strongest indictment against the actual state of the institutions of religion. The real charge against them is that they have as yet scarcely begun to be religious. No adversary of Christianity can possibly bring such a rebuke to the worldliness, the intolerance, and the self-complacency which lurk under the Christian name, as come from the words of Jesus himself.

Think what Jesus set out to do; consider the work for which he called around him a group of disciples; create anew in your heart the vision of the Kingdom of Heaven, and how paltry the proud ecclesiasticisms of Christendom become! These are not helps, but hindrances to the work he began, and which he still points out to us. Say, as Jesus said, that you have been placed in the world to "bear witness to the truth," to see what the truth is, and then to speak it as bravely and directly as you can. What use will you have then for some elaborate creed, formulated by men long since dead? That will not help you to clear thinking or to plain speaking. As well might one who wished to see, put an opaque shade before his eyes. Realize the meaning of the beatitude pronounced upon the meek, and the arrogant assumptions made by churches in the name of religion are at once seen for what they are, — they are the denial of something fundamental in the religion of Jesus. The corruptions of Christianity are sins against the soul of Christianity; they wrong the very cause whose name they bear.

The true reformer does not, in any case, have to go far for his most effective arguments. He rebukes sin by recalling men to their own unrealized ideals. His utmost skill is to interpret those laws that are written on their own natures. What a fine moral courtesy there is in the words of Paul: "We persuade men, but we are made manifest unto God; and I hope that we are made manifest in your consciences." Only when a man sees a truth manifested in his own conscience, and finds it verified by his own experience, is he persuaded of it.

We must be patient with the slow processes by which persuasion comes. We must be willing to rejoice when

we see people coming to higher truth, in their own way, the familiar phrase taking on nobler meaning, the thought of their childhood developing till, insensibly, it has passed into something worthy of their maturer mind. It is an impertinence for us to attempt to dictate the way in which other souls should grow. It is enough for us if they do grow. •

There is a genial wisdom in the passage wherein Laurence Sterne touches on the pedantry of those who would array morality in a learned and foreign garb, and seek at a distance for what simple men find near at hand. “‘The son ought to pay her (his mother) respect; as you may read, Yorick, at large, in the first book of the Institutes of Justinian, at the eleventh title, and the tenth section.’—‘I can read it as well,’ replied Yorick, ‘in the Catechism.’”

One who is in earnest that a great principle shall be recognized will not trouble himself much as to where other men find it written. Each must find it in the place nearest himself, and in language which he can understand. But, once found, the great thing is that it should be obeyed. The penalty for disobedience is not arbitrary; it is not a consequence of the deed, so much as a part of the deed itself. He who denounces impending woe is not so effective a preacher of repentance as he who makes clear what has happened to those whose sins appear to have gone unpunished. Already their sins have found them out. It could not be otherwise, for whatever else may happen they cannot escape the wrong that was done to their own souls.

FORTNIGHTLY SERMONS.

Entering into Our Heritage.

A SERMON

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ENTERING INTO OUR HERITAGE.

If there is therefore any comfort in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. — PHILIPPIANS ii. 1, 2.

It is a very common thing for a person who has been educated in one form of religion and who has been content with it, to awake suddenly to a sense of something lacking in his education and experience. He then begins to look about him, and sees other forms of faith, — forms which seem to him to be beautiful, tender, significant, and yet from which he is barred out.

He looks at the worshippers of some other creed with something approaching envy. He is like a stranger, at night, looking through a window at those who have been invited to some great house. He sees the bright rooms, and thinks how happy those are who are privileged to enter; but against him the doors are closed. He can only stand there in the cold and say, "Oh that all this might be mine!" It matters very little what the form of faith in which one has been educated may be; every form is in its nature partial. Its development has been one-sided; it appeals to a certain kind of character; and whenever another part of the

nature has been developed, it finds cravings which have not been satisfied.

Here is one educated in the Catholic church, feeling deeply its sanctities, — feeling, for a time, that all the sanctities dwell there. So long as this feeling continues he is well content. But there comes at length an intellectual awakening; then he discovers that there is something good outside the church. Then there is a longing for intellectual freedom, for wider horizons. The adventurous soul needs room for its explorations. The man brought up within the church has a certain envy of those who have the freedom of the world.

The Society of Friends reacting against all ceremonials felt that they had progressed to a purely spiritual religion. Sometimes, however, out of the very heart of Quakerism comes one with an artistic nature, — one who loves beauty, one to whom form is not an unessential thing. There comes the appreciation of music, architecture, and all the beautiful arts. Then arises the feeling that there are those who look upon these arts not as enemies but as helps to religion. How happy must they be who have been thus privileged!

We speak sometimes of our liberal Christianity as if it represented the completest spiritual development. But its progress has also been one-sided; and while it has gained something it has lost something. In the emphasis on intellectual liberty, how many beautiful things may have been forgotten! Now and then there comes a time when a person is conscious of this, and realizes that there are phases of religious experience to which thus far he has been a stranger. There are those to whom religion is something more intense and earnest than to himself. There are those to whom it is a more intimate presence, and a more satisfying reality. Then

he feels that he has been cheated out of some rich treasure. He sees those whom he imagines enjoy these better things. "Oh that I could enter in with them, but for me the door is shut."

I want to speak this morning of what seems to me the most essential thing in liberal religion. It is not the present attainment, not the idea that we have something which is perfect, sufficient for all souls, but only this: that there is nothing in our thought which prevents any soul from getting directly and for itself whatever it most needs. There is no pretension, and there should be no thought, of any little storehouse within which have already been gathered the spiritual treasures of the world. Humanity itself forms the storehouse of the soul, — all its garnered experiences, all its hopes, all its faiths lie open to us; they form our heritage, we may enter in and take that which seems good to us.

If there is any meaning in the idea of freedom in religion, it lies in this, — that we deny, once for all, that any man or any church can monopolize any spiritual good. All that belongs to the nature of man, all that has been developed there, belongs to each one who appreciates it, who seeks it. There are no walls built around some home of piety which can shut out from us the essential things of that piety. Wherever there is any religion we claim the right to love it, and we seek to make it our own.

It was John Calvin, who, when pleading for personal religion as against traditional religion, declared the right of every man to take the best things wherever they were found. He says, speaking of the fathers, "while making use of their writings we always remember that 'all things are ours,' to serve us, and not to have dominion over us. . . . There is reason, they say,

for the admonition of Solomon 'not to transgress the ancient landmarks which our fathers have set up.' But the same rule is not applicable to the bounding of fields and to the obedience of faith, which ought to be ready to 'forget her own people and her father's house.' "

Now, that is the thought on which we must stand. Men have claimed the ownership of certain fields of religious experience, building up here and there some wall we must not pass. The time comes when we must say, "All things are ours." The best things cannot be held as private property. So we come to look not merely at the life and teaching of Jesus, but at the teaching of every great soul; "if there is any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit," we want to find it, to make it our own, because these things belong to man as man. When we come in this spirit, instead of turning away from any beautiful faith which impresses us, and for which our soul longs, instead of thinking that to accept that faith we must take all its limitations, we rather ask, What is the essence of it? After all, what is the one thing in it that really touches us, attracts us? It must be something we need; and if we need it, it must be true to us to-day. Why not take, why not assimilate it, so that it shall become a part of our being?

The other day I was reading a most admirable sermon by a Trinitarian minister upon the Trinity. He said, "The Trinity is the word for the fulness of the Infinite on whom we rest."

Should I, because I am not a Trinitarian, and because I cannot accept this formula as complete, have nothing of this? Am I not truer to my own thought when I say, "All that you love, I love; what you at heart believe in, I believe in, — the divineness of the Fatherhood, the

divineness of the Sonship, the divineness of the spirit of truth. You have your words for the fulness of the Infinite, I may have different words. The vessels are different in form, but that which fills them is the same."

One man says, "I believe in light," and he rejoices in the sunlight streaming around him. Another man says, "I believe in more than that; I believe in all the colors that make up the spectrum." At bottom the faith is one; the true faith reaches farther than either declares; for in the light shining about us all the colors of the rainbow may be found by analysis, and there are rays more wonderful still which the eye cannot recognize. One who believes in light believes not only in the rays that come directly, but in the light reflected from the mountain-top, from the desert, and from the sea. So the lover of truth is not confined to abstractions; he must have a quick appreciation of all the various symbols by which it is expressed. Many a thought rejected as a dogma may be used freely as a symbol. Only we must remember that the symbols are infinite in number. Each one is useful as a suggestion, not as a definition. As a Unitarian I do not feel shut off from any spiritual significance which I may find in the Trinitarian formula. God conceived of as Father, Son, and Spirit, brings to us, it is said, the thought of the divine significance of Fatherhood, Sonship, and the sweet communion of friendship. Yes, fatherhood has something divine in it, and so has brotherhood. Motherhood also has its sacred symbolism, and his experience must have been very shallow who is not able to understand what depth of feeling has given rise to the worship of the Madonna. The form of it is peculiar to a certain age; the tender significance of it is for all time.

In like manner men have frequently looked back with longing to what they have dreamed of as the Nature-worship of primitive times. Schiller plaintively lamented the passing away of the worship of the gods of Greece. How beautiful it must have been to see the woods and mountains as the abode of radiant deities! But one does not need to go back to the creed of Paganism in order to find a divine significance in Nature. That which is really attractive remains. I believe that there have been many in our nineteenth century to whom Nature has been as full of divine significance as to any of those who brought garlands to a woodland altar. Emerson did not have to go back to Olympus; he found satisfaction for his spiritual nature in Monadnock. He heard the mountain call: —

“Take the bounty of thy birth,
Taste the lordship of the earth.
I heard and I obeyed,
Assured that he who made the claim,
Well known, but loving not a name,
Was not to be gainsaid.”

How few of us have ever really claimed the “bounty of our birth”! When we do claim it, how simple a thing it is to go directly to the fountains of inspiration; and, going, we find none of them closed to us.

When we feel the power of the Gospels to which the Christian world turns, let us approach them in the same spirit. We have no dogma to plead for, no preconceptions which are to be maintained as if they were ultimate truths.

We are weak, and we need strength. We have our times of discouragement, and then we need an uplifting thought, and the strength which comes from a great soul. If what we read of the life of Jesus brings the

vision our souls desire; if we get glimpses of serener being and of all-embracing love; if we find in his character something that makes us more sure of God and of ourselves, why not take the good we discover? Speculative questions need not interfere with spiritual appreciation.

There are many things in the Christian tradition which to us are incredible; there are theories about Jesus which we cannot accept; but this is no reason why we should not get at the heart of Christianity. It is rather the reason why we should endeavor to get at the heart of it and to find its real treasure. If there is "any consolation of love, any fellowship of the Spirit, any tender mercies and compassions," these are the things we need. These things form the imperishable treasure of humanity.

FORTNIGHTLY SERMONS.

OPTIMISM, PESSIMISM,
AND COURAGE.

A SERMON

Preached in the First Parish Church, Cambridge, Mass.

BY

REV. S. M. CROTHERS.



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OPTIMISM, PESSIMISM, AND COURAGE.

Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart. . . . All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth to such as keep his covenant. . . . I have been young and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. — SELECTIONS FROM THE PSALMS.

Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul? which long for death but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures. . . . I loathe my life, I would not live alway. Let me alone for my days are vanity. . . . I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death; a land of thick darkness as of darkness itself; a land of the shadow of death, without any order and where the light is as darkness. — JOB.

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not forsaken; cast down but not destroyed. . . . All things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; for though the outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. — 2 CORINTHIANS iv.

Wait on the Lord, be of good courage and he will strengthen thy heart; wait, I say, on the Lord. — PSALM xxxi. 24.

FROM the beginning the optimist and pessimist have confronted one another. If two men were cast upon an island, the first question would be: What kind of a land is this, and how is it fitted for our habitation? Our knowledge of human nature would hardly lead us to ex-

pect that the two men would agree in their judgments. Their actual experience might be the same, but their temperaments would lead them to different and perhaps contradictory interpretations of the facts.

There are those to whom the jubilant psalm is the most natural expression of the feelings aroused by the whole order of the universe. Simply to live is joy; they are conscious of harmony between the soul and its surroundings. For them "evil is but good in the making;" and sorrow appears but as a preparation for fuller blessedness. Goodness and mercy have followed them all their days, and they have not a doubt but that the law that governs all things is a law of perfect justice. So sure are they that everything is working for good, that they call on all men to join in the song of thanksgiving.

But beautiful as the song is, it is not allowed to go unchallenged. There comes the crash of a harsh discord, as one is heard crying bitterly: "I loathe my life, I would not live alway." There are those who cannot hide from themselves the dark side of things. They cannot treat evil as an illusion, nor are they satisfied with the easy explanation which refers it to the human will, as if the individual sufferer should bear the weight of responsibility for it all. There is doubtless an evil that men choose, but there are also miseries which come to the innocent. The grim fact is that there is suffering involved in the very constitution of things. How familiar the long indictment against what the optimist worships as the "perfect whole." War and rapine, disease and torturing death, blighted hopes and wasted powers, — these are involved in it.

In Browning's poem, little Pippa, on her one holiday, passes through the streets of Asolo, and sings in simple joy, —

“God’s in His heaven,
All’s right with the world.”

And the song floats up through the windows into rooms where lust and murder reign. All is not right, but very wretched there, and the child’s voice comes to the sinful souls only to intensify their misery.

It is very easy, the pessimist says, to cry all’s well, if one is ignorant of real life. When one is happy, he likes to think of all others as sharing his good fortune. But this amiable feeling does not remedy the curvature of the poor child’s spine, nor relieve the hunger of the starving girl in the tenement house. “Praise is comely” on Thanksgiving day, and the Christmas carol is pleasant to the ear; but the tragedy of existence ceases not for an instant. In the quiet church, to a select audience, the preacher discourses on the dignity of humanity and the high privileges of life, and his hearers say Amen. But what of those who are not his hearers. The slums of the city have their humanity also — something not very dignified, but wolfish, ravenous, vile. There are conditions under which life is not a privilege, but a doom.

As we contrast our ideals with the hard facts, can we not sympathize with Omar Khayyam?

“Ah, Love, could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
Would ye not shatter it to bits and then
Remould it nearer to the hearts desire.”

Yes, optimism and pessimism have confronted each other from the beginning, and they still stand with the same stubborn contradiction. The growth of knowledge has added to the number of facts on either side, so that the

catalogue of good and ill has been lengthened; but essentially the controversy rests where it always has been. No decisive fact has been discovered which, of itself, turns the scale. Is there more misery or happiness in life? It is easy to propound the question and to call witnesses, but the difficulty is to get an impartial jury. Those whose opinions are given with the most confidence, are just the ones who would first be challenged.

But what is the interest of practical morality and religion in this controversy? We are, in these days, apt to take for granted that religion is dependent on thorough-going optimism for its foundation. When one is in a pessimistic mood, we must first convince him of his intellectual error, and make him see that when the balance is struck between the good and the evil, the good always preponderates. We must justify the ways of God to man, and the preacher of religion must be a well-trained apologist for the Universe.

But if this be so, the controversy begins again. Here is only another instance, the despondent man says, of the ingrained injustice of the world. To him that hath is given. The gospel comes only to those who have no need of it; for those only who have been blessed with a cheerful disposition are able to accept it. Religion becomes, in his eyes, only another of the pleasant illusions, impossible for those who have been cursed with the capacity for clear seeing.

But the way to righteousness need not be by this weary round of conflicting arguments. Let us, for the time, leave the theoretical question, as to whether this is a good world, where it is; and let us face the question, which is to us more urgent, whether it is possible for us to live a good life. This question may not have the cosmic sweep of the other, but it deserves precedence

because it is necessary. For the answer to this question we need to introduce a third element, — courage.

The appeal to courage is the appeal from the uncertainties of the outer world to “the inner man.” Courage has nothing to do with the event; it has nothing to do even with the conditions that are around it; it does not count the cost. It simply sees its appointed work, and does it, come what may. Now to pessimist and optimist alike come the words, “Be of good courage.”

When we begin by urging the necessity of faith and hope, the pessimist replies that we are begging the question. What is there to believe in? What is there to hope for? But the need of courage comes to every man, whatever may be his opinion as to the ultimate outcome of his endeavors. The first word of religion is a word of noble daring. Do not wait, it says, to make sure that the world is altogether good before you choose the good part for yourself. It speaks alike to those who see the dark and the bright side of things.

Do you believe that all things are working for good? Do not let that be only an idle, good-natured faith. Dare to put it to the test. Do not hide from sorrow and sin. Work heartily *with* all good things. Carry your gospel of cheer to those who need it.

On the other hand, do you suspect that the evil influences are the stronger? All the more need then for you to have the courage to withstand them. The good cause, you say, fails; so it may be. But if you have recognized it as good, then your duty is plain. You may see

“Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne.”

Then has come your time to decide between them. It is an austere judgment day not to be evaded.

“Then it is the brave man chooses
While the coward stands aside.”

What shall happen to you, you may know not, but what you *are*, you determine by your own act. You may not be able to prevent things going wrong, but you need not go with them. When you say, prove to me that the good deed shall be rewarded, duty answers, —

“What is that to thee, follow thou me.”

The moral choice is an act of supreme courage. It is the choice of the leaden casket, with its warning inscription, —

“Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.”

And the brave man accepts the hazard. He says, I will dare to love men, and serve them, even though they may be ungrateful. I will dare to be true, though the world be false, and its promises vanity. I will trust myself to noble ideals, though this be indeed a sorry scheme of things, in the midst of which my lot is cast. I will seek for God, even though I may never find Him.

It was with an appeal to simple manhood that the old Stoics began; and so did the Hebrew prophets, and so must we. The brave man sees the worst, yet does not falter in his allegiance to the best. Though sore perplexed, he is not in despair; many times cast down, he is not destroyed. Though the outer world should be all against him, yet the inner man is renewed day by day.

When we turn to the literature of our day, much of which is filled with a painful analysis of morbid conditions, and with repining over the misery of existence, we must feel that the need is not only for a better philosophy, but for a braver temper of mind. That which

is apparent is the weakness of soul, which spends itself in vain lamentation. Courage does not wait for the solution of the problems which the pessimist proposes. The demands for a worthy life are too urgent to allow time for preliminary debate.

In this appeal to courage, one may seem to be evading the real question, whether this is God's world, wherein the good must triumph. The ethical answer is that we must cleave to the good, for its own sake, whether we see it to be triumphant or not. Yet the question is not, in reality, evaded, but only postponed. The brave man is, actually, putting himself in the way of finding out whether the power in which he lives is good or not. He is adopting the only way by which truth is found, — the way of experiment. Faith and hope may not be at the beginning, but they grow out of his courageous endeavor.

There are some things which grow more clear to him as he goes on, — truths which the coward could never discover. There is a faith of courage, — a confidence which is the result of trials bravely endured.

The first practical lesson which the brave man learns is that the hard things of life are not so intolerable as he had imagined. Fear exaggerates difficulties; when we resolutely face them, we learn their limitations. There is no despair like that of absolute inexperience. The trouble of to-day seems infinite, and to leave no room for happy living in the future. He who resolves to go through it without flinching comes out stronger for his struggle. This is the lesson which is learned on the battle-field, and which transforms the raw recruit into the veteran. We do not know what we can do, or what we can endure, until we try. The old romances tell of the way in which the valiant knight would ride

forth against some giant whose form loomed portentous in the distance. But when he touched him with the spear, the huge apparition vanished, or proved but a mask behind which a pygmy hid. So Bunyan's Pilgrim, as he journeys on, discovers that the lions by the wayside are chained. Who is there that has not often verified these old allegories. We cannot be too often reminded that the wails and lamentations over the woes of existence do not come from the great army of workers, nor even from those who have been called to suffer most. Those who have grappled most firmly with the evils of the world have learned that courage is near akin to cheer.

The second lesson learned is that courage discovers and creates new joys of its own. "Rejoicing in tribulation" is a paradox which the epicurean pessimist cannot understand, and yet it has been a real experience. He who would express all the varied gladness of humanity, must be able not simply to sing of ease and restful beauty. He must not only tell of "one who dreamed of idleness in groves Elysian." The song of joy must have for its accompaniment not only the soft flute, but the trumpet and the many-toned organ. The hero discovers a stern joy in the conflict, the half-starved explorer finds his spirits rising in the midst of uncertainty, the reformer grappling with gigantic evils feels himself uplifted into a region of lofty cheer, and they who looked upon the martyr about to die, saw "his face as it had been the face of an angel." Mark the steps in the evolution of a great and abiding hopefulness. "Now tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope." A French critic says that the Acts of the Apostles is more full of exhilaration than any book since the Odyssey. The theme of the Odyssey was the misadventures of a

wanderer returning from the wars; the Acts of the Apostles tells of the trials and persecutions of a little band of believers in the midst of a hostile empire. Men never tire of telling the brave old tales of the men who have joyously surmounted the obstacles in their path. There are not only joys not belonging to the victors, but still finer blessedness coming through self-surrender and renunciation. To know the possibilities of humanity we must not only listen to the heroes but also to the saints. We must learn what Saint Francis of Assisi meant when he discoursed with his disciples about perfect bliss. The bliss he found was not less real because to the proud and selfish it would have been perfect misery.

When one takes these things into account, the balance sheet which the pessimist has drawn up must be greatly revised. Many things which he has catalogued as unmitigated evils must be carefully scrutinized. Evil to whom? What to the undeveloped man seems evil may be only an impulse to a needed change. Paul's words about the inward man being "renewed day by day," are in accord with the best philosophy of our own time. Human life is not a fixed quantity, nor does it exist always in the same form. It is capable of continual renewal, and is able to adjust itself to changing conditions. The new situation develops new powers. The savage delights in the freedom of the forest and finds in its rude adventures satisfaction for his nature. Civilization is fatal to the savage, yet it is not unfriendly to the race. Man has the power to emerge out of the savage condition, and when he does this with a nature renewed and invigorated by higher ideals, he finds sources of happiness opened which before he could never have discovered.

These two lessons, then, brave men have learned: the evils of life are not unbearable, and its possible good is

measured only by our own ability to appreciate it and to use it. But one lesson more must be learned before courage brings us not only to morality but to worship. Many of the Stoics felt that their manful morality was itself a defiance of the gods. The good man would abolish evil if he could. The gods could do so but would not. There are modern philosophers who adopt essentially the same view, seeing an irreconcilable antagonism between the cosmic order and the moral order.

But there is a philosophy which rejects this dualism and declares that there is a sublime unity. It is not content to say that the outward world is God's world, while the inner world of love and courage is in revolt against it. Its daring faith is that the ideal world is God's world also. It sees God in the soul; in its dissatisfaction with actual conditions; in its stern judgment on present wrong; in its sensitiveness to injustice; in its brave resolve to do all and suffer all for truth. He who sees this, finds in the very lamentation of the pessimist something to cheer him. When he bewails the evil of the external world, he does it only because there is shining upon it the splendors of the ideal world. He complains of the imperfect only because the thought of the perfect has dawned upon him. The Sphinx riddle of existence is not solved, but it ceases to be depressing.

"I heard a poet answer,
Aloud and cheerfully,
Say on, sweet Sphinx, thy dirges
Are pleasant songs to me."

They become pleasant songs to one "whose soul sees the perfect which his eyes seek in vain."

The soul is being renewed day by day; it has capacities for endless progress. This one thought is enough to keep

us from despair. But there is another thought which goes with it. The Universe also has capacity for change. This old world is continually being renewed. The Persian poet would conspire with the Eternal to break up "the sorry scheme of things," and then "remould it nearer to the heart's desire." His *blasphemy* is not more daring than the *faith* of the greatest of the servants of God. They would with Him conspire to break up the world's selfish life and ignorant thought, and then remould it nearer to the heart's desire. Is not this involved in the New Testament antithesis between the soul and what is called "the World"? The world of brute force, of selfish impulse, of cruel custom, is something to be overcome and put under our feet. In doing that we are working with God in the creation of the new world in which righteousness shall dwell. In the desires and aspirations of faithful hearts is a power that is destined to remould all things.

They who give themselves heartily and cheerily to this work pass by alike the castle of indolence, where an easy Optimism folds its hands because the world goes on well enough without its help, and the seat of the scornful, where a sullen Pessimism folds its hands because an evil world is far beyond the reach of help. Bravely they press on, ready if need be to endure the worst, but with faces ever turned towards the best. What shall we call them? Optimists? Yes: only their optimism is not the gift of a happy temperament, but an achievement; it is the optimism of courage. They believe in the good that is to be, because they have given themselves to the work of creating it.

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LOVE TAKETH NOT ACCOUNT
OF EVIL.

A SERMON

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LOVE TAKETH NOT ACCOUNT OF EVIL.

Taketh not account of evil. — 1 CORINTHIANS xiii. 5.

WHEN it is said that love taketh not account of evil, the man of the world may answer, "That is but another way of saying that love is blind. It is evident that evil exists, and that evil influences play a large part in the actual world; and if love does not see this, it is hardly consistent with wisdom. The affectionate child may, for a time, live in blissful unconsciousness of what is going on, but the man knows better."

This answer, however, is based on a misapprehension. To take no account of a thing does not mean to deny its existence, but only to treat it as irrelevant to the purpose in hand. There can be no clear thought nor effective action unless we exclude from the mind all that does not belong to the subject under consideration. An irrelevant fact is as confusing as a falsehood. Each faculty has its function and its natural limitations. We see only so much of reality as is visible, and hear only what is audible. So our reason has to do only with actual relations, in other words, with what is reasonable. If we could conceive of an aggregation of altogether unrelated facts, a jumble of particulars incapable of being explained by general laws, — with all that, reason would have nothing to

do. Reason takes no account of nonsense. Conscience has to do only with moral relations ; it takes account only of the actions and thoughts of responsible beings. With those who are irresponsible, conscience has nothing to do.

Now, as reason deals with what is essentially reasonable, and conscience with what is moral, so love has its own sphere of action. It has to do with what is lovable. In these days we have to plead for the rights of the affections to go out toward their own proper objects. The battle for liberty of thought has already been fought out. This means that the intellect should be allowed to follow its own laws without being confused by considerations that do not belong to it. When the question is as to the truth of any proposition, you must answer it according to its own merits. It is not allowable to bring in questions of utility or expediency or even of piety. If a thing is proven true, that is the end of it, so far as the truth-seeker is concerned. The influence of this truth upon the happiness, the morals, or the religion of the people is a matter for another kind of consideration, but it is irrelevant to the immediate work of the scientific investigator.

While intellectual processes have thus been jealously guarded against influences which would destroy their integrity, we have been less careful to protect our emotional nature. We are victims of emotional extravagance which is likely to lead to bankruptcy of true feeling. With the marvellous expansion of our knowledge of the actual world, there comes the desire to realize it all in feeling as well as in thought. There is a craving for some experience that is "intense." Now, morbid feelings are apt to seem more intense than those that are thoroughly wholesome, and in the desire to get close to reality, there is danger of falling into morbidness. We

see this in our literature and art. The artist starts out with the praiseworthy intention of giving us a faithful transcript of reality; he will not indulge in flattery, but will paint life as it is. He would make us feel deeply the presence of the actual.

But all true art implies selection, a choice of certain materials and points of view. The great artists and poets of the past made no attempt to disguise the choice they made. They were lovers of the beautiful, the sublime, the heroic. Beauty to them was something to be sought for diligently, and when found was to be wrought through patient labor into enduring form. Now, however, we have those who say that we have no right to choose, we must photograph reality, showing it just as we find it. A great deal of it is not beautiful or inspiring, it may be a very painful reality, or a very trivial reality; that makes no difference. In the very attempt, however, at impartial treatment we find an unconscious bias, manifesting itself in the actual choice of the most disagreeable and dreary themes. And the dreariness is supposed to be a positive proof of the faithfulness of the portrayal. The new commandment is: "Whatsoever things are true, however impure they are, however unlovely, and of whatever ill-repute, if there is any weakness or futility or vice, let us think on these things." We are asked to admire the conscientious portraiture of unrelieved ugliness. The ugliness exists, and why should we not delight in examining its duplicate? It is made a point of duty to turn from the stories of heroic achievement, of wholesome, glad-hearted men and women who loved and labored and found life good. Anything like dramatic unity, or strong controlling purpose, is looked upon with suspicion. Let us analyze the vague ambitions of the mentally and morally incapable, and feel the

delicious thrill which comes as we see them swept away by an unrelenting fate. Let us make a study of the inane and the inconsequent. How the strong soul overcomes temptations and triumphs over obstacles, is a theme in which the natural man rejoices ; but a higher virtue is supposed to belong to the dismal recital of the way in which weak souls yield to their temptations, without any struggle that deserves the name. It is not that we are asked to turn from the history of worldly success to "the short and simple annals of the poor," for such stories are often brave and wholesome. The most depressing works are the tedious and involved annals of the idle rich.

One might almost imagine that he was reading a satire on contemporary taste in Bunyan's parable of the muck-rake. "The Interpreter takes them apart, and has them first into a room where there was a man that could look no way but downwards, with a muck-rake in his hand. There stood also one over his head with a celestial crown in his hand, and proffered him that crown for his muck-rake ; but the man did neither look up, nor regard, but raked to himself the straws, the small sticks, and dust of the floor. . . . Then said Christiana, O deliver me from this muck-rake." How fervently many of us can join in the petition of Christiana.

The man with the muck-rake has his argument. He can prove that all the things he so carefully collects are real, they belong to the order of Nature. Why should they not be exhibited and admired ?

We answer the plea by admitting once for all the matters of fact. Yes, these are real things, your straws are real straws, the small sticks are small sticks, and the dust of the floor is indisputable. But what of it ? When you have collected it all, what have you but a rubbish

heap? All that your muck-rake collects is not worth the crown which is above your head, and which you do not see because you refuse to look up. You believe in realism, and you do well; your mistake is in ignoring those higher realities which alone are able to interpret and explain the lower. You talk of Nature; now Nature has her failures, but she doesn't parade them or insist on giving them immortality. Her subtle chemistry speedily converts what is loathsome into some new form of beauty. Decay is made to feed life. All things that exist have not equal values, and the lower gives way continually to the higher. That is not a true transcript of Nature which does not indicate these comparative values. The picture without perspective must give a false impression.

That there is evil in the world, we need not deny; but our business is not to collect it, or to brood over it. It does not exist for its own sake, and it cannot, by itself, be the proper material for our meditation. That life is largely made up of failure and imperfection may be true, yet is there all the more need that we set our affections on the idea of the perfect. The miner actually takes out of the ground tons of worthless earth, while he measures the gold by ounces; yet his thought is fixed on the gold and he takes no account of the mass of material that he casts away upon the dump. The story of any noble achievement may be so told that we may lose all sense of its nobility and perceive only a monotonous and disheartening record of failure. Tell what happened day by day, with no sense of proportion, no intimation of final purpose, with one incident having the same value as another, and you get this dreary result. Though you give all the facts just as they occurred, you are not in this way telling the truth. The truth is more

inspiring. The man failed many times, but each failure brought him a little nearer to real success. At last the thing he longed for came to him, in different fashion perhaps than he expected, but it came, and it was worth all he paid for it.

“Love taketh not account of evil,” not because it does not see it, but because it *sees through it*. Sin, sorrow, suffering, — these facts are opaque to the understanding; it cannot explain them. But there are other rays which shine through them, finding in them no obstruction. Love sees through the imperfect and repulsive form, and discerns “the soul of goodness in things evil.” When that is once seen, it becomes all important.

This clairvoyance of love is a necessity to all finer judgments. Two persons, for example, are looking at a picture. One looks upon it unimaginatively and unappreciatively. The canvas, he sees, is old, the colors are faded, there are obvious defects in the drawing, the forms are angular, and there is an utter lack of perspective. Seeing all this he passes it by with contempt. Then there comes an enthusiastic lover of art, and stands for hours before that same picture, studying every detail. Does he not see the defects? Yes, but he takes no account of them; they do not interfere with his enjoyment. This picture represents an important stage in the history of art. The painter shared with his contemporaries many faults; he was limited by inevitable mannerisms, — but in one point he was admirable. This one touch of originality makes him a master, and, in contemplation of that, his manifold shortcomings are forgotten. The critic who does not see the single excellence as an illuminated point in the surrounding darkness, is lacking in insight, and soon becomes nothing but a fault-finder. The fault-finder prides himself on his cleverness; but in

reality he only advertises his own failure. He is like a pearl-diver who should boast that he can be trusted to bring up from the bottom of the sea everything except pearls.

Our judgments upon the characters and actions of our fellow-men have value only as we have a real interest in them and a love for them. How little we understand the motives of any one for whom we do not care. We say that the mother's love blinds her to the defects of her child. True, she does not dwell on them or publish them abroad; but it may be, not because she is blind to them, but only because she sees something more. These things do not interfere with her love. Her love goes directly to its object, and that is something pure and altogether lovable. She has discovered the essential thing and counts all else as dross.

"From imperfection's murkiest cloud,
Darts forth one ray of perfect light,
One flash of heaven's glory."

It is that one ray of perfect light that love sees and rejoices in.

Those who "take not account of evil" are not the ones who flee from it; they are the ones who overcome it. For they are able to overcome it only when they are absorbed in the contemplation of something good. It is a false philosophy which urges the sinner to brood over the thought of his sin and misery till he sees only that. Remorse never saved a soul; that is the work of love and hope. There must be the forward look.

"Do as the heavens have done; forget your evil;
With them forgive yourself."

There are obstacles in every path, but it does no good to accept them as finalities, to sit down before them and

meditate upon them. It will not do to make too much of them and treat them too seriously. It is possible to go over them or around them. The brimming river does not stop in its course to lament because it has been cut off from some channel through which last year it flowed. It flows on, and in flowing makes a new channel for itself. So many a man finds himself shut off from what at first he chose. Circumstances hem him in, and his energies cannot move in the lines of his desire. Yet is he not condemned to dull stagnation. If one opportunity is closed to him another is opened. He must do, not what he would, but what he can. But what he can do, he resolves to do with the whole heart, and in whole-hearted activity he finds joy. When one comes to lament with him over his deprivations, he hardly knows what to say; in fact, he had half forgotten them. He has learned the secret of the loving life, and can afford to treat lightly the evils of his lot, because his heart is fixed upon the good.

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FORTNIGHTLY SERMONS.

THREE PERMANENT TYPES
OF RELIGION.

A SERMON

Preached in the First Parish Church, Cambridge, Mass.

BY

REV. S. M. CROTHERS.



C

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THE regular publication of the Sermons preached in the FIRST PARISH CHURCH OF CAMBRIDGE, and published fortnightly by it, is undertaken with the intention of furnishing as many copies as possible for those who are anxious to know something of the spirit of Liberal Christianity.

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THREE PERMANENT TYPES OF RELIGION.

Every priest, indeed, standeth day by day ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices. — HEBREWS x. 11.

Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. — PSALM xl. 7-9.

Then I turned about and my heart was set to know, and to search out, and to seek wisdom and the reason of things. — ECCLESIASTES vii. 25.

IN order to have any clear thinking it is necessary that we have a correct classification of the objects of our thought. At first we classify things by accidental and superficial resemblances. Things that look alike we put together. The scientific observer, however, is not content with this. His mind is intent on the deeper and more necessary relations. He classifies according to a principle which ignores the accidental and finds the real characteristics.

In like manner we must learn to look at religion. We find only confusion if we accept sectarian divisions as final. Many of them are only accidental, and give no clew to the great impulses which are at work. There are, however, certain types of religion which are persistent, and which manifest themselves under the most diverse conditions. Let us consider three of these

types; and we can perhaps best understand them if we look at the men who are their natural leaders and representatives.

The first type is that of the priest. We see the priest at the very dawn of history; and whether we turn to the Book of Genesis or to the pages of Homer, we find the same characteristics. The priest is the guardian of the sacred things. To him all times and places are not alike, and his piety is not shocked at the thought of vast spaces where God is not. It is enough for him that there is one place where God is. To that holy spot he turns with solemn awe. What if the Universe be profane, and life a brutal battle, so long as the sanctuary remains inviolate! He looks abroad and sees evil triumphant; gross darkness is over the world. All the more beautiful by contrast is the holy place. Whether it be the holy mountain which the desert wanderer worships from afar, or the holy stone, or the holy tree, — symbol of eternal life, — or the temple built by pious hands, each must have its priest. He is the sworn servant of its sanctities and its mysteries, and he would give his life to protect them from a defiling touch.

It is characteristic of the priest that he loves repetition. The rhythmical chant is the natural expression of his emotion. The restless thinker is ever seeking for a new idea, and is never so glad as when he feels the thrill of discovery; but there is a sacred monotony dear to the priestly heart. He never tires of a familiar refrain. He loves to tell "the old, old story" which becomes more sweet with all the associations which it gathers to itself. We often talk slightly of dead and empty forms, as if thereby we described the liturgical element in worship. But to the true priest the words so often repeated are not dead, but are all alive. Shaks-

peare, who interpreted the thoughts of all men, entered into the mind of the priest. The priest uses repetition, as the true lover does, because "love alters not."

"What's new to speak, what's new to register,
That may express my love or thy dear merit?
Nothing. . . . But yet, like prayers divine,
I must each day say o'er the very same:
Counting no old thing old, thou mine, I thine,
Even as when first I hallowed thy fair name.
So that eternal love in love's fresh case
Weighs not the dust and injury of age."

Only when we recognize this changeless loyalty of love can we do justice to the conservatism of priest-hoods. Students of civilization tell us that the cult survives the creed. Customs remain long after their original meanings have been forgotten. New meanings are put into them; and a new faith makes use of the old forms. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews touches upon the characteristic love of the priest for repetition when he says: "Every priest standeth day by day, ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices." He illuminates also another point when he says that "the priest has compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way." We know the charm which the sacerdotal service has for persons of the finest culture,—for the priest cares for the beautiful, and knows the influence of music and architecture; but he touches also the other extreme of society. The sluggish mind does not readily grasp a new idea, and the dull conscience is not easily moved by reason. But day by day the priest stands with the same symbols of a compelling love, and those who cannot understand come vaguely to feel a sanctity that rebukes the sin, and a compassion which welcomes the sinner. And when

those who are tired and disheartened turn to the priest, they find rest for their souls.

It happens, therefore, that amid religious revolutions the priest of a faith discredited in the centres of thought still finds multitudes of simple-hearted people who cling to him. After Christianity had conquered in the capitals of the world, the men of the heath still worshipped at the old altars. And to-day, in spite of all iconoclastic influences, the peasant loves "the priest and the bell and the holy well," and when they are taken from him his soul is left forlorn.

But though the priest is the first minister of religion, he is not the only one. There is a ministry in which he has no part, and for which he has little power of appreciation. Breaking in upon his sacred chant, we hear a new voice, clear, strong, thrilling, — hear the cry which startles the worshipper and frightens the priest: "Lo, I come. In the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O God. I have proclaimed righteousness in the great congregation." Who is this who dares cry aloud with such insistent emphasis upon his individuality? He speaks like a man in haste, who must deliver a message which burns like fire. He is a man with a burden upon his heart; in his tones there is a mingling of agony and exultation.

He is the prophet, and his religion is the religion of private and public righteousness. God does not care for sacrifices, he says, and is not pleased by long prayers; but he has given us a duty to do, and the time is short for its fulfilment. Both the priest and the prophet see in light a symbol of the divine reality; but the light which the priest adores is that which shines on the altar when all else is dark. He follows "the kindly light amid the encircling gloom," but it has nothing in com-

mon with the "garish day." The prophet cries, "My God is a consuming fire." This lurid flame shall consume every refuge of lies, every stronghold of oppression. It shall consume your altar, O priest, if you think by repeating holy words to atone for neglecting holy deeds!

God is not simply in the past, — God is in the spirit of righteous revolution to-day. "He shall overturn and overturn till he whose right it is shall come." The prophet and the priest both believe in holiness, but the priest says, "All ye who love the holy things, turn aside from the rude world; come seek with me the place where all is pure." The prophet says, "I will not turn aside, I will not refrain my lips; I will speak aloud in the great congregation; I will say to men, 'You must not seek some holy place far from the world's work and the world's sorrow. Your part is to go out into the world and make it holy.' 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach good tidings to the poor.'"

The mission of religion is to destroy the oppressor; it is to break every bond. So the prophet sees before him some specific work to be done; that is God's work because it is right, and all the passion of his soul goes out to that. His voice is rude and harsh sometimes; he casts aside impatiently many a sacred form; he tries everything by this one standard of the right. He says, "Now is the axe laid at the root of the tree, and every tree that bringeth not forth fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire."

All the forms, all the usages, all the sacred things which show no fruit in practical well-doing,—these the prophets say but cumber the ground. God, they proclaim, loves mercy, and not sacrifice; righteousness, and not the repetition of sacred words. And the priest never

yet understood the prophet. When the prophet cries aloud, the priest, even the good priest, is frightened. The prophet is come to overturn, and the priest loves that which is established. The prophet's bold words seem blasphemy, and his deeds seem only destructive. "He comes to destroy the Temple," says the priest.

But just as the priest does not readily understand the prophet, so there is another kind of religious teacher whom the prophet, intent upon his work of practical reform, does not understand. Listen to this third man of religion. "Then I turned, and my heart was set to know and to search out and to seek wisdom, and to know the reason of things." Beyond the religion of the priest and the prophet there comes the religion of the philosopher, — the cool; critical observer of the world. The prophet says: "All the world is divided into two armies; on one side is the right, and on the other side the wrong, and we must choose this day between them, and, having chosen, we must fight to the end. We cannot be indifferent, cannot stand aside." When the fervent appeal comes, the philosopher says: "But I must stand aside. I am not so sure that all things are thus divided into the absolutely good and the absolutely bad; and if they are divided, I want to know both the evil and the good. I want to know the reason of things. You say, good prophet, that this world suffers simply because men are wicked; it is a matter of human will. Here are evils, you say, all around you, and if you but will you may destroy them all, and you are impatient until all men join your party, speak your word; then you say we will drive out the evil, and the blessed day of peace and justice will come in at once." Every prophet has said that, every reformer has said that,— that there is just one root of all evil in society,

and if we can strike at that, striking at the root of the tree, then the good time, the millennium of peace, will come. The Hebrew prophets thought that the triumph of Jerusalem was at hand, and with it the triumph of righteousness. The early Christian prophets thought that even in their generation the final victory was to come, and Christ was to appear in the clouds, and all would be well. But the philosopher says: "I must look into this; I must trace these evils further than to that specific source you see. I see something besides this personal element or this moral element in the world. There are impersonal forces; there are laws which have been from the very beginning and are involved in the nature of the universe itself, and I see the same phenomena generation after generation. You denounce evil. I must study it, and to study it I must not take sides, I must not have my brain afire even with righteous indignation; I must study it as the physician studies the disease, not impatient with the disease, not hating or blaming his patient, but studying all. I must see just how far, if at all, the disease may be alleviated; I must have time, by reserving my judgment, to determine whether some of the things you call evil are evil after all. So, good prophet, I cannot join you; I cannot go forth on the fiery crusade under your leadership when you call. I am only standing apart studying the reason of things, seeking to know and to understand before I act, and there are some times and places where I shall refuse to act at all because I do not know." Here are a new set of virtues unknown either to the priest or to the prophet, — tolerance, impartiality, the reserve of judgment, the judicial attitude toward all things. And the philosopher says that many times the prophet has failed because he has generalized hastily;

things have not come to pass as he thought they would come to pass, because there are other forces that have been working and bringing to naught his predictions.

To the prophet there are three distinct periods of time, — yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow. Yesterday was full of superstition and injustice; it is the land of bondage from which we are fleeing. To-day is the battle-field; to-morrow the final victory will come. But the philosopher sees vast periods of time, both before and after. Yesterday, he says, was not all evil. It was itself the result of what had gone before. Only when you go back to "the day before yesterday," from which it emerged, will you do justice to it. And to-morrow is not a finality, for there must come a "day after to-morrow." When your cause has triumphed, new forces will come into the field to challenge its dominion. When all comes to pass which you predict, then must it be seen that "the end is not yet."

The prophet, in the intensity of his zeal, gathers around him a party, and believes that the future is in the hands of this "saving remnant." If you read the Hebrew prophets, you will find how they became impatient with the slow march of events. They could not trust the people as a whole, governed, as they were, by so many motives, and so many of those motives low and mean; but they said a remnant shall be left, and that remnant shall accomplish the renovation of the world. The philosopher says: "I do not believe that; it is not the remnant that does the world's work. The future of any nation or any civilization depends upon the sum total of all the lives and all the thoughts of the people; it depends not simply upon the finest minds or the truest consciences, but it is the average man who is, after all, to do the work."

“The World Soul knows his own affair,
Fore-looking when he would prepare
For the next ages men of mould,
Well embodied, well ensouled ;
He cools the present’s fiery glow,
Sets the life-pulse strong, but slow.”

And the prophet does not understand the philosopher. He seems cold and indifferent. It is only after time has passed and wisdom is justified of her children that we begin to realize that the philosophers have had a real religion. They have taken the wider view of life; they have seen the great forces that govern all; they have traced the law running through unconscious and conscious being, and they have felt a great awe, which has grown into worship. They have worshipped not the little god enshrined in some one temple, not the god of hosts leading one nation to victory, but the One in All. The law behind all life, the universal power, they recognize and they adore. The way of God is in the sanctuary, the priest says. “God’s way,” says the philosopher, “is upon the great deep.”

Now, what shall we say in regard to these three types of religion? Shall we say that one type not only follows another, but destroys necessarily its predecessors? Originally there was the religion of the priest; then came the religion of the prophet; and at last, as we grow in wisdom, there will come to us the religion of clear thinking, from which the prophet’s fire and the priest’s sanctity have departed; we shall see great laws, irresistible forces; shall be thrilled with cosmic emotion; but we ourselves shall be dwarfed. We shall hear no voice which appeals directly to us, saying, This one thing do, this one way follow. I think, rather, that the problem of the Church and the problem of the individual

is to reconcile these three elements. The true religion must be the religion of the priest, the prophet, and the philosopher in one. The religion of the priest finds its great word in sanctity; the religion of the prophet in righteousness; the religion of the philosopher in truth. And the Church must say to the philosopher, "We have need of you. The time has passed when we would restrict your freedom. We rather look to you as guide and discoverer, and we say to you, 'Hold fast the truth, hold fast the liberty by which alone truth can be found;' but we ask you to remember that the most sublime truth and the truth nearest us is one that involves the element of right and wrong. We want you to see what the great philosopher saw when he said that there were but two things before which he bowed: one was the starry heaven, and the other was the moral law." So we say to the philosopher, "We need you; we need your clear thought, but we need it for a purpose; we need it to illuminate our conduct, to help us in the struggle of our daily life."

So the Church must say to the prophet, to the reformer: "We need you. We need you, with your clear conscience, with your sense of the demands of the present time; we need you to right the wrong; we need you to lead in the battle which is before us. But we ask you before you begin the battle to be sure that it is the true cause for which you are enlisted. We ask you not to waste your strength any longer upon non-essentials; we ask you no longer to be the slave of prejudice; we ask you to take counsel of the best philosophy, to listen to the words of ripest reason, to learn that sweet reasonableness without which all courage is vain. We ask you not to be impatient, not to be self-confident, not to confound what belongs to your idiosyncrasy with what

belongs to the eternal truth. If you do, you are to be disappointed. You must learn, through true philosophy, to have great faith in time, and, having done all, to wait for the fulfilment. You must learn, when throwing all your strength into the cause you love, that after all you are but one among millions of men, and that your cause may fail, and yet through other men and other ways the right may be done. You must learn that hardest lesson to the prophetic soul, that lesson which the philosopher only can teach you,—that ‘God fulfils himself in many ways, lest one good custom should corrupt the world.’ ”

When the philosopher and the prophet have been united, what shall we say to the priest? We shall say, “We have need of you, too, O priest of the living God! All about us are the ignorant and the erring; all about us are little children looking up and asking that the old, old story, that they can understand, shall be repeated; all about us are those who need the symbol and cannot grasp the reality without it. Every one of us is a child sometimes, all of us children at last; and we need to be taught as little children are taught,—line upon line and precept upon precept. And human nature, if it is to keep that which is given it, must bring all these things into itself, must turn the thought into the habit by repeating over and over again the things it loves. There is still the need of the sacred place and the sacred hour and the sacred symbol, and need for the priestly soul to minister at the altar, offering always the same sacrifices. But we say to you, O priest, that you must learn lessons from the philosopher and the prophet before you may find what the truly sacred thing is. You must learn from the philosopher that God is not confined to your shrine though he may be there;

that God is in this place only because he is everywhere. This time is beautiful because any time which men consecrate by true thought and devotion is sacred and beautiful. And so it is necessary that you should know that there is nothing sacred but that which is just and right; that holy lives are more than holy words, and that the holy words have power only when they are spoken from holy souls." When the priest learns this, learns the lesson of courage, learns the lesson of the wider thought, new sanctity comes, the old words become transparent to the light of truth.

Then priest, prophet, philosopher, come to an understanding one with the other, each bringing his own gift to the common altar, — sanctity, righteousness, truth, these three; and these three are one.

FORTNIGHTLY SERMONS.

The School and the Church.

A SERMON

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BY

REV. S. M. CROTHERS.



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THE SCHOOL AND THE CHURCH.

Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy.—2 CORINTHIANS iii. 24.

MANY persons find it difficult to understand the idea of a liberal church. They have been so accustomed to the thought of the Church as an institution pledged to a definite dogmatic system, and claiming a supernatural origin, if not a supernatural authority, that a church that makes no such claims seems to have no reason for existence. A church without a formal creed seems to them like a nation without laws.

Now I believe that liberalism in religion does not mean spiritual anarchy, but that it has in it possibilities of large and effective organization. When men begin to think for themselves, they find the old organization no longer adequate, but the result of their effort will be seen at last in a better and freer organization. As a result of the expansion of thought in our day there is coming a new kind of church.

The way in which the conception of the Church is being changed may be best illustrated by comparing it with a corresponding change which has already taken place in the methods of education. The Church and the school have stood side by side, and a revolution in one cannot take place without producing an effect upon the other.

What is the character of the revolution that has taken place in the school? It is a far-reaching one. Once the common notion was that the school was primarily a storehouse of knowledge; it contained something which could not be obtained elsewhere. It was assumed that the mind of the child was empty, and it must be brought here to be filled. Not only was the child's mind empty, but it was also naturally averse to knowledge, and the school must be plentifully endowed with the means of coercion. In the school stood the stern schoolmaster with a rod, which was the fit symbol of his authority. The will of the pupil must be broken, and when the faculties had become passive they were ready for the knowledge that was to be poured into them. One who had for a certain length of time submitted to this course of discipline was sent out into the world as an educated person.

I do not say that this was ever the theory of the wisest teachers, but it was the common theory of the school. The idea of freedom had very little place in the schoolmaster's mind. He conceived himself to be the dispenser of learning, while the child was merely a passive recipient. What was taught must be received on his authority, or on that of the text-book.

But there were two apparitions that disturbed the old-time schoolmaster. One was "the self-made man." "Knowledge is power," said the copy-book, and yet many of the choicest products of the schools seemed altogether lacking in practical efficiency, while those who were without these advantages often won success. Continually there appeared men whose opportunities had been most narrowly limited, but who had proved themselves not only stronger but wiser than their fellows. These men seemed not to have achieved eminence in spite of their disadvantages; but to have found a

certain advantage in their deprivations. Deprived in early life of many books, they had come close to reality; and such books as they had, they had studied eagerly. Their minds were not satiated, but continually stimulated. Having no schoolmaster to settle all things by authority, they learned to question and experiment. The process was a slow one, and yet it brought strength and sagacity, beside which the erudition of the prize scholars seemed ineffective.

And not only did the apparition of the self-made man disturb the complacency of the schoolmaster, but he also began to be troubled by what he saw in the child itself. The child in school was often dull and inattentive, but on the playground every faculty was alert. A little sympathetic observation showed that play was something more than idleness. The child, obeying the impulse of its own nature, was learning important lessons, and developing powers needed in after life. The hero of the playground was very likely to outstrip the pale boy who received the praise of the class-room.

Now, when it was seen that the education received outside the school was often more valuable than that received in it, what conclusion did men draw? There were those who said, "The school is unnecessary and might well be discarded. Let each man educate himself." But others more wisely said: "The school is necessary, but it is also necessary to have better schools. Let the school learn from the playground and from the actual work of life, and let it seek to develop power and encourage originality, and no longer be content with methods which repress rather than stimulate."

The great change which has come in educational methods only indicates the new point of view. Instead of thinking of the child as an empty vessel to be filled,

we think of him as having powers and aptitudes to be developed. The school teacher does not come any longer as one having dominion over the mind, but as a helper and a guide. The best teaching is not that which communicates the most facts, but which gives the most stimulus to powers already existing. The kindergarten comes from the study of the child at play. The child plays on, unconscious of restraint, but is all the time under wise and patient guidance. The manual training school, with its principle of learning by doing, offers the opportunity for that touch with real things which is the condition of power; and the large freedom of the university presupposes minds eager for knowledge and needing no compulsion.

Sometimes the illiterate parent comes to the teacher and asks, "Why don't you learn my child something?" Then the teacher has to give the parent instruction not only in the use of words, but in the philosophy of education. The teacher says, "I cannot *learn* your child anything; he must do that for himself. I can only *teach*, which is a very different thing." The teacher can do little for a mind that has no activity of its own. The school offers only an opportunity. The responsibility must rest on those who come to it, for the full use of the opportunity.

Now, the Church is passing through a similar evolution, only that it has not yet as clear an understanding of itself as the school.

What is the idea of the Church? The traditional idea is that it is the storehouse of "a deposit" of faith. Certain truths are committed to its care which men could not have found out for themselves. As the schoolmaster assumed that the mind of the child was empty of knowledge and averse to it, so the priest assumed

that the soul was averse to religious truths. The Church was an institution claiming to have dominion over the faith of its members. It must have elaborate creeds to define just what the true faith is. It must have some power of discipline to enforce its decrees on the unwilling conscience and the rebellious reason. If you analyze the organization of religion you will see how much of it depends on this notion that religion is not something natural, but needs some external sanction to give it authority.

But as the old-fashioned schoolmaster saw those who had not been to school who yet had gained intellectual discipline, so the priest and the preacher saw those outside the Church who had somehow developed the graces of the spirit. He could not but see that these people were truth-loving, gentle, pure in heart, and yet they did not belong to the Church. He also saw little children, too young to be influenced by any institution, and yet doing instinctively what older people painfully sought to do. If the human heart was at enmity with God, and was utterly depraved, why did Jesus find in little children the type of the kingdom of heaven?

And of such questionings came in some minds the idea that the Church was unnecessary, seeing that the religious life could be developed without it. Others have said, "We need the Church, but it must be a better church."

The modern idea of the Church is based on the idea of individual liberty and responsibility. As the school takes for granted intellectual aptitudes which belong to the individual, so the Church must take for granted certain spiritual powers. It does not create them, but only seeks to develop them. It has no need any longer

for the machinery of compulsion. The Church, like the school, is an opportunity. The best church is that which offers the largest and highest opportunities.

What are these opportunities which every church should offer to all who come within its influence?

The first is the opportunity for sincere thinking and speaking. In order to give this, most of the churches of Christendom must cast aside much that they have formerly thought essential to their well-being. The objection to a creed as a bond of union is moral rather than intellectual. It is not that the creed may not be true, but that he who subscribes to it is after a while likely to become indifferent to the question whether it is true or not. Having once given his formal adherence to it, he repeats it from force of habit rather than from any present conviction of its reality. Under such circumstances sincere thinking and speaking are impossible; the man does not tell you what he thinks; indeed, he does not think at all; he only utters again a dead formula. When we plead for a church without a creed, we do not mean a church without faith. We mean a church where each individual will be encouraged to express fully and freely what he believes. Free thought ought not to be grudgingly tolerated; it is one of the objects for which the Church exists. It is quite unlikely that when a large number of people express themselves with perfect candor, the result will be that formal agreement dear to the ecclesiastical mind, but it will be something much better.

In the second place, the Church must offer an opportunity for the most serious morality. I say serious rather than earnest morality, for people may be earnest in regard to what is really trivial. I mean that in the Church moral laws must be treated as seriously as

physical laws are in the laboratory. The chemist does not follow a law just so far as it pleases him and then stop. He knows that there is something in nature inexorable, and not dependent on his whims or prejudices. Too often the morality of the pulpit is whimsical or conventional; one standard is set up in one sphere of life and another in another. I have heard the heroes of the Bible praised for deeds which if done to-day would be treated as crimes. Such teaching lacks the quality of moral seriousness.

The Church must give the opportunity for the broadest and most genial humanity. In order to do this it must no longer insist on artificial distinctions, but must acknowledge goodness wherever it finds it. The distinctions between the regenerate and the unregenerate, the saints and the sinners, have no longer any reality. All the moral inquisition which grew out of the notion that the Church was a company of the elect is now worse than useless. What is needed is not a way of escape from the world, but larger opportunities for service in the world.

Above all, the Church must give opportunities for free and spiritual worship. Do you say that in order to do this there need be no change or enlargement? When we consider what worship means, we see that perfect freedom is the necessary condition of perfect worship. For worship comes not from the contemplation of the finite, but of the Infinite. The soul that worships is not satisfied with what is merely respectable; it yields itself in wondering reverence to the highest and the best. And what is the highest? It cannot be fixed once for all; it always goes before us. What yesterday satisfied us is not sufficient for to-day. The idea of God grows; and we must leave room for this growth.

One symbol after another may thus be cast aside, while the sense of the infinite reality becomes more clear and strong. The Church becomes the enemy of religion when it says to the aspiring soul, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther."

The new church must seem a weak and imperfect thing if judged by the old ecclesiastical standard; but it ought to be judged by another standard. How far does it help to make life pure and strong and joyous? How far does it furnish the incentive and the opportunity for sincere thought, for serious morality, for broad human feeling, and for spiritual worship? If it helps us in these directions, it has fulfilled its mission.

May 15, 1896.

PRICE \$1.00 A YEAR.

No. XV.

FORTNIGHTLY SERMONS.

Our Real Environment.

A SERMON

Preached in the First Parish Church, Cambridge, Mass.

BY

REV. S. M. CROTHERS.



CAMBRIDGE:
JOHN WILSON AND SON.

University Press.

1896.

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OUR REAL ENVIRONMENT.

Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves.

Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet. — ISAIAH xxviii. 15-17.

Do people ever really talk in that way? Do they say deliberately, — We will make lies our refuge, under falsehood will we hide ourselves?

To one who believed in the doctrine of inherent depravity in human nature, believed that the human will was desperately attracted to all evil, it would be natural to ascribe to man a deliberate choice of evil for its own sake. I am inclined to think that, except in the case of some moral monstrosity, of some one who can scarcely be held accountable for his own actions, such a deliberate choice is not made. The man, seeing clearly and from the beginning two courses before him, chooses that which at the time he thinks to be the better. And yet I believe also that though we may not hear many people saying so bluntly, "We have made lies our refuge," yet practically just this attitude is assumed

by more people than we at first imagine. Not that people deliberately choose the lie to live by instead of the truth, but that they accept the choice that is already made for them.

There is more weakness than wickedness in the world, and much of what we call wickedness is but a kind of weakness. Those "scornful men" of whom the prophet speaks were in reality weak men. They had not chosen their own position in the world, not chosen their specific environment, but they accepted it, and did not manfully struggle against it. They were a part of a social order which to them was all the world. They began to see that it was a cruel world, a false world; its laws, many of them, were lies, when tested by the ideal standard; but such as it was, it was their world, and what could they do against it? After a time they came to be reconciled to it, and apologized for it. They were irritated when any one arose who pictured it truly.

The men said, — All that these prophets say may be true in regard to this world's powers which are over us, this state of things in which corruption reigns, this rule of brute force to which we have been so long accustomed; this may be the very law of hell that governs us; but it *does* govern us, it is to-day a strong thing, and to escape it is impossible.

Man can reconcile himself to almost anything, and adapt himself to any condition in which he finds himself. Just as the Stoic said that it was possible for a man wherever he lived, to live nobly; so another sort of man will say, It is possible for a man to live ignobly anywhere. It is possible to accept and obey a power which we know to be false, to find a certain refuge for one's personal life by adapting ourselves to an evil situation.

We find in the New Testament always the contrast between the soul and the "World." And the very summing up of all that against which the disciples were warned is worldliness. Now, by that word is not meant this cosmic order in which we live, not God's great world. The meaning is something that comes nearer to us than that; it is our little world that touches us, the immediate surroundings of our personal life. And we find in the New Testament, and in all true religious literature, the strong cry of the soul to overcome this world and to rise above its evil.

Now it matters not what kind of a world a man may live in, there can be no spiritual freedom until he has risen above it, and this cannot be done without a struggle. For an individual to rise even a little above the level of the life around him requires a mighty effort. This is what makes the work of the philanthropist so unexpectedly difficult.

Going from an atmosphere of intelligence and freedom, he feels that he has a mission to his fellows; he goes down into the slums of the great city, wherever there is the most misery and crime; and his heart is filled with pity. Here are the prisoners of poverty, prisoners of ignorance, and he fancies them repining always at their lot, struggling, though with futile effort, to escape; and he feels that they will welcome him when he comes to help them.

A short trial shows him his mistake. When first he heard the saying that "one half of the world does not know how the other half lives," he thought that the only thing was for *him* to know how that other half lived. But this is only part of the lesson. This half of the world that is living in its ignorance and wretchedness, does not know how the other half of the world

lives. It does not know, and it does not care to know. It is a world of narrow horizons, but there are those to whom it is the only world there is. This world has its business, its literature, its ignoble arts, its scope for cleverness, its ambitions, its wit, its wisdom, and its amusements. There are those who have become perfectly adapted to that world. It is a sordid and vile world, but they say, Such as it is, it is ours; we are living in it, we know how to get along in it. There is a certain worldly wisdom here, hard and defiant, that confronts the would-be helper. You do not know anything about it, these people say; you do not know anything about the strength of those forces that are about us, the hideous fascination that draws us into what seems to you to be utter misery. We have not chosen it, it has chosen us; but we have no power to escape it. It is too strong for us, and we yield to it. And so the man who went seeking to help his fellows is looked upon as an intruder, or treated as one who, however well meaning, is lacking in the sense of what is practicable.

The great problem is, How are we to penetrate that hardness of heart that has come at last from adaptation to such environment?

Now, suppose we change that scene and go to what seems to be exactly the other extreme of society; there, too, we find those who have adapted themselves to the world they live in. This time it is a bright, a glittering world, a world of fashion and of success, but a world that is as lacking in love and as lacking in truth as that dark world from which we emerged. Here we find the man of the world, now with more cultured speech, more polished manners, but speaking of the ideal truth in the same tone of contemptuous superiority.

Lord Chesterfield writes to his godson of this world

into which the English gentleman is to come and bear a part. He tells him that it is essentially a false world; he says that many of its laws are lacking in justice, but such as it is, he urges the young man to enter it and make the most of it. "In courts," he writes, "you may expect to meet connections without friendship, enmities without hatred, honor without virtue, appearances saved, realities sacrificed, good manners and bad morals." "I advise you to trust no man or woman more than is absolutely necessary, to accept all proffered friendship with great civility but with great incredulity."

Now, what could you say to one who speaks thus? You cannot say anything that he does not know in regard to the moral bearing of all this. He knows better than you can tell him the immorality of it all. He knows the wretchedness which the cold heart entails upon his fellows; he knows that the world of which he speaks is but a glittering surface, without reality, that its promises of joy are not fulfilled. With cynical smile he confesses all that, only wondering that you should mention a fact so self-evident.

This great world of his is covered with ice, — a glittering surface. The man of the world is the one who has learned the art of skimming lightly over it, not thinking of what happens to those who follow. In this world there are no austere and eternal laws, only the edicts of fashion. There is no conscience sitting upon its judgment-seat, there is only good taste; there are no broken hearts to be bound up, there are only broken vows to be forgotten.

So men speak about the world of society, the world of business, the world of politics. "We know," they say, "how much of falsehood reigns, how shallow are the pretences, how arbitrary are many of the laws that

govern here. We know all this. This is the world. This is the way the world is made, the only world for which we care; the only thing to do, after all, is this, — to forget all that makes one too scrupulous, to take the world as it is, and to learn how to get on." This is the last word of a purely worldly wisdom.

Now, what shall we say to all this? The satirist has very much to say, and yet all the satire from Juvenal to Swift does not pierce the armor of the man who says, "It is the way of the world, and a very bad way it is indeed; but it is not for me to attempt to change it. A very false world, but the best we have." And denunciation is as powerless as satire.

That which attracts me in the words of the text is the appeal, not to a destructive, but a constructive force.

Jehovah is made to say to those scornful men in Jerusalem, You take it that the world is false, and you must accept it because it is strong; therefore I will show you that the world is founded, not on falsehood, but on truth. Your falsehood shall be confronted by a truth which is scrupulous, exact, inexorable. "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet." In a world where all has seemed chaotic and crooked, there shall appear before you a new standard.

I do not believe that we ever grow into the power that belongs to righteousness until we come to have that perfect confidence in the ideal truth.

When things are most evil it will not answer to bring something which we say is "good enough." We are strong only when we confront the evil of the world with our very best, the best the heart and mind have conceived.

That is the hopeful thing in modern philanthropy. The time was when society confronted its criminals and its ignorant classes, not with its best, but with what it conceived to be good enough. Fanaticism, passion, and ignorance were set to fight the lower forces. The brutal criminal was told by society, You have chosen the law of hell, now we will teach you how much worse it is than you conceived. We will put you in surroundings that are altogether loathsome; we will put over you keepers more brutal, more cruel than yourself. There you shall find your rightful punishment.

The hard heart grew harder under this treatment, and said, This power is stronger than mine, but it is of the same kind.

To-day society is learning a higher lesson, — to apply the plummet line of righteousness. It says to the criminal, You chose the law of hell, you chose the rule of passion, but you cannot make good your choice; this covenant of yours shall be annulled. We shall compel you, not to face a greater cruelty and brutality, we shall compel you to confront day by day a law of perfect rectitude, — a justice that is without passion, a justice that gives to you every chance for amendment, but a justice which you cannot escape. You shall be surrounded by it, you shall be protected by it, and its presence shall be your punishment so long as your old choice remains.

We are coming to see the same thing in regard to the forces of ignorance. We must send our best and our truest where the need is greatest. The men and the women filled with the best thought of our civilization, these shall be our missionaries and our ministers. The worst must come in contact with the best, and the first thing that we must do for men is to make them see that

there is this higher world, of which before they had been ignorant. Amid all the materialism and worldliness of our age, we need to raise up standards of ideal excellence. Nothing less than this will suffice.

When a true man lives, his very life becomes a revelation of new possibilities. It comes as the discovery of a new world, in which shall dwell righteousness. Who has not seen the power of just such a personality rebuking the pettiness, the secret selfishness of the common life? For such a man to live is to give us new courage. Not what he says, but what he is, becomes the power.

“The stern are meek when he is nigh,
The flippant put themselves to school
And hear him, and the stubborn fool
Is silent and he knows not why.”

This is the answer which God through His children gives to the world. It is through the revelation of a higher world, with its better possibilities. We cannot escape the influence of our environment, but we can be made to see what our real environment is. We live in a universe which is real and true. In this universe falsehood cannot long shelter us. If we live crooked lives, we still must live in the presence of eternal rectitude. The power that governs us moves straight on, and will not flatter us in our moral infirmity. If we sin, it is against an unchanging law; our pettiness is confronted by that which is infinite. He who awakes to the fact that he is living in God's world, realizes that all sin is folly.

June 1, 1896.

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FORTNIGHTLY SERMONS.

FOR THEIR SAKE.

A SERMON

Preached in the First Parish Church, Cambridge, Mass.

BY

REV. S. M. CROTHERS.



CAMBRIDGE:

JOHN WILSON AND SON.

University Press.

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FOR THEIR SAKE.

For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. — PSALM cxxii. 8.

ONE of the great ends of all education is mental enlargement, — not simply to give the mind more power, but to give it a wider range. The uneducated mind, we say, is the narrow mind. It may act quickly and well in regard to those things which are near at hand, but it is deficient in general ideas.

There are means which enlarge the mind, such as travel, and the influence of new associations. The man taken away from his first environment, released from local prejudice, comes to know how great things may be beyond the limits of his town or nation. He returns from such a view of the world larger in his thought. And so we turn to books, finding there the means by which we may escape from the limitations, not only of our place, but of our time. Entering into companionship with the great men of other generations, we become their fellow-citizens, and look out through their eyes. We are no longer the victims of accidental influences. We are enabled to enjoy many things which before have been beyond our thought. The mind grows more alert, life becomes fuller. Not only is the mind enlarged, but it is enriched by new

treasures from afar. And yet when all this has been done, we have to admit that many of those whom we call educated persons are, after all, extremely narrow; narrow not in their thoughts so much as in their sympathies. When some great work calls upon them for more than intellectual appreciation, calls upon them to give themselves, we find that the appeal is made to an unenlightened and unenlarged conscience. And therefore, besides the intellectual, there must a moral culture. This is the cultivation of the power to will and to do. How does this come to us? It comes in the same way in which any other enlargement comes. The great thing is to get out of ourselves, to get some point of view where we can see things, not as they affect us as individuals, but as they affect some larger being of which we are a part. The man who has never learned to be thoroughly alive and alert to things which concern others more than they concern himself is still living in a narrow place. He has not learned the real meaning of his own life who has not learned quickly and gladly to respond to the appeal to act for his "brethren and companions' sakes."

Now this is more than an enlargement of our life, it is also a transformation of character; because we know that the great transforming power in regard to vital things is the purpose for which they are used. Nature is parsimonious in regard to forms. It does not make a new form, a new organ, until there is a new need. Indeed, it is the new need that transforms the old organ.

No matter how well endowed the nature may be, it becomes narrow if its powers are used for a petty purpose. It becomes sordid, earthly, unspiritual. The organ answers to its habitual use. The savage uses his eyes to seek his prey and to avoid his enemies. His brain is active, but it is the activity of cunning, and not of wisdom.

How inadequate his power of vision to the perception of the beauty or the sublimity of the scenes among which he moves. The poet and the philosopher see these things because they have used their faculties in the search for them.

Our powers are purified, and at last transfigured, by the higher services in which they are enlisted. To the devout imagination of the Catholic worshipper, the bread and wine cease to be material substances and become the body and blood of Christ when the consecrated words are spoken over them. A transubstantiation like this takes place when what seemed in itself altogether commonplace is consecrated to an unselfish ideal.

The existence of the family has such transforming power. The little bit of land and the brick and mortar of a house cease to be only material facts and are lifted into the spiritual order when they become a home. And a man's daily toil becomes a different thing when he works, not for himself alone, but for those he loves. Go to communities like the camps of the lumbermen and miners, where you find an aggregation of individuals released from permanent social ties, and you see the struggle for existence unrelieved by any elevated or tender sentiment. Each man is working for himself. He has no thought beyond the next pay-day, when what he has acquired will be quickly squandered. Where the family instead of the individual becomes the social unit, industry becomes more steady, and the necessity for thrift is recognized. What a man would not do for himself, he does for those dependent on him. For the sake of wife and children he denies himself the momentary gratification, and makes preparation for the future. Take away this controlling motive, and civilization begins to disintegrate.

When one sees beyond the family a greater body to which he yields allegiance, again his nature is enlarged. He feels that he has a duty to the nation. Here is a body whose years are centuries, and whose welfare depends upon the wisdom and virtue of successive generations. There come times when the individual must make choice between his own personal advantage and that of this great body to which he belongs. He must lose in order that those who come after may gain. He who makes the disinterested choice is the true citizen.

In times of war multitudes become capable of such choice. They sacrifice themselves gladly, under the influence of the passion of the hour. But, alas, how hard it is to make this exaltation of spirit habitual. And yet the country needs disinterested service as much in peace as in war. Here in America we have no lack of keen politicians, working for parties and for sections, but how few with minds that take in the country as a whole, and not only the country that now is, but that which is to be. We are despondent as we compare our statesmen with the great citizens of the past; but perhaps the difficulty is not that there are fewer great men, but that the demand is greater than ever before. The statesmen of Greece had not before them problems of such magnitude as those that confront the mind to-day. They were inhabitants of little cities, whose interests they were called upon to guard. They nobly performed their appointed work, but they seldom rose to the height where they thought of Greece as a whole, and they never thought of legislating for the welfare of humanity.

Such a nation as ours, with its varied interests, its representatives of all races, makes an unprecedented demand upon intellect and conscience. What freedom from personal and local prejudice, what quickness of

apprehension, what tolerance, what sympathy, what magnanimity, are needed for those who would guide the destinies of America! One must rise to the thought of the nation, but in order to act wisely and justly he must rise to a still greater thought, the thought of humanity. This is no longer an abstraction of philosophers. Mankind has been too closely united by the inventions of modern times, the relations of different nations have become too intimate, for a patriotism that excludes from its thought all that lies beyond its own borders. We must learn to think of the world as our country.

Well may we ask, Who is sufficient for these things? There must be a moral and religious culture adequate to the task set before us. It must prepare us to live as citizens of the world. We must cultivate the corporate consciousness, and be ready to assume our larger responsibilities.

We have been learning the lesson of responsibility; now we must learn, as free individuals, to unite for the common welfare. We have not done our whole duty when we have kept ourselves clear of personal participation in wrong-doing, as if we could then wash our hands in innocency. So long as wrong is being done, we cannot be at peace. It is a small thing to satisfy the scruples of the private conscience; the great thing is to work steadily for universal righteousness.

As we realize the meaning of the eternal law we see that the greatest motives are those which take us beyond the range of selfish interests.

No man feels the highest moral inspirations so long as he asks: "How will this action affect myself; how will it influence my career, or help my reputation?"

It is only when "the beggar self forgets to ask" that the great principles of life are revealed. He can-

not go far wrong who has learned to work for the sake of family and friends, for his country and for the world.

This motive, reaching beyond merely personal interests, is the one to which we must appeal when we present the claims of the Church. Church-going is no longer accepted as synonymous with religion, nor is it deemed essential to salvation. From the stand-point of the individual who thinks of his own pleasure or even of his own profit, it may often seem to be of doubtful value. There are means of spiritual culture open to one who is prepared to appreciate them, which involve no close association with others. Ask the question of the Church, What may I get out of it? and you may find that you do not get enough out of it to repay the effort involved. This is what many people are asking, and their thought goes no further. No wonder that under such circumstances the Church is neglected. It is in vain that it attempts to satisfy such a demand. It tries all sorts of adventitious attractions, and it fails. When it seeks to amuse or even to instruct, it meets rivals which do these things better. The theatre, the club, the newspaper, the lecture are preferred before it.

The Church is not felt to be a necessity until the man feels the full force of the social impulse. When he feels the common need then he reaches out for fellowship in thought, in prayer, in work. "What can he get out of it?" He does not ask that question. The Church to him means comradeship; the sharing of burdens; the mingling of aspirations; the concentration of the spiritual energy of multitudes^r or tasks too great for any one individual. It means more^{ac} than the common work of any one generation. The Church stands for the continuity of the religious activity. Every church that has a

history behind it has a dignity and strength like that of the nation. To belong to it brings inspiration as one thinks of the past struggles and triumphs. And the thought that a church has a future outlasting its present membership deepens the sense of responsibility.

Of those who think they have outgrown the need of the Church, I only ask: What are you doing for the highest interests of the community in which you live? What are you doing for your "brethren and companions' sakes"? You are doing something if, all alone, you cherish ennobling thoughts, and live pure lives and seek to know the truth. But do you not do more if you join heartily with others who cherish noble thoughts, and who strive to make conditions for pure life everywhere? May there not be something finer than the solitary search for truth? Is there not an added grace when you come to share the truth with others?

Now, that is what the Church means. It is the organization of the religious life of the community. Its appeal is to the same kind of sentiment that supports the nation. So long as a nation has citizens who subordinate private interests to the public welfare, it will endure. So long as a church has loyal members capable of action from like disinterested motives, its future also is assured.

June 15, 1896.

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FORTNIGHTLY SERMONS.

The Conservative Element
in Liberal Religion.

A SERMON

Preached in the First Parish Church, Cambridge, Mass.

BY

REV. S. M. CROTHERS.



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THE CONSERVATIVE ELEMENT IN LIBERAL RELIGION.

No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for he saith, The old is better. — ST. LUKE v. 39.

THE words “radical” and “conservative” have often been grossly misused. They have been treated as terms which adequately describe opposing parties; as if one set of people would consistently cling to whatever is old and well established, and another set of people would always just as consistently advocate every new thing. But it is evident that no one who has learned to think would willingly enroll himself in either of these parties. Jesus describes the method of the truly free man when he says that every well-instructed Scribe is like a householder who bringeth forth out of his treasures things old and new. Every such man is radical and conservative by turns. Such a mind knows what it is to share the glad surprise of the discoverer, to enter into the joys of the pioneer; but it also knows the charm and the power that belong to that which is deeply rooted in the past. Such a mind has its “peak in Darien,” but it also has its hilltop, whence it looks down upon its own home, and sees the familiar paths trodden by many loved feet, while beyond is the churchyard with its sacred graves.

The Westminster Catechism asks, "How doth God execute his decrees?" and the answer is, "God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence." Man executes his decrees in the same way. There is a creative element in the mind, making new forms of thought; but there is also a providential function, preserving those good things which have already been produced. It is characteristic of the untrammelled mind that it changes readily from one form of activity to the other.

The parables of the new wine in the old wine-skins and the new cloth on the old garment are parables which in our radical moments we love to quote. There seems always to be a fine application ready at hand, and there is a certain irony in the fact that ecclesiastical men, who, of all men, are given to the incongruous patchwork of old and new, should find such quick rebuke in their own Scriptures. Yet as we read on we suddenly find that the tables are turned. We had said: "Away with everything that is old. It is for us of this generation to make all things new; there must be new wine in new bottles; there must be a new spirit, and a new form through which that spirit must be expressed." But the parable that had delighted us takes an unexpected turn. Let the new wine, says Jesus, be put in new bottles. But this does not prove that the new wine is the best. A different judgment is given: "No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for he saith, 'The old is better.'"

There are some things in the world that are better for being old. This is something which the self-confident innovator does not readily understand. He has come with his wares, newly invented, and he imagines that

their novelty must to all men be the chief attraction. He is prepared for that dull, stupid conservatism which prefers the old merely because it is too much trouble to examine the new; but he is not prepared for the enlightened conservatism, which, having known both, prefers the old.

It is here a question of taste. One who has actually tasted the old wine, said Jesus, does not desire the new. And the influence of all that kind of education which makes us actually get the best things which have come down to us from ages past, produces this kind of conservatism.

One who knows what classic literature is, one who recognizes in it, to use the fine phrase of Milton, "the seasoned life of man preserved and stored away in books," is not apt to accept the latest book as necessarily the best. The lover of art clings to the old masters, and is not led astray by the latest product of the studio. And so it must be in religion. The art of life is a very difficult art, and there are few indeed that have attained in it supreme excellency. To really know the best in the world is to see that no one generation, not even our own, can lay claim to all that is best; the great things must be sought in many ages, and must be the result of long experience. To understand and to admire the massive simplicity of a truly great soul, one that has stood the test of centuries and has been admired by many generations, is to have a standard in the mind by which all others must be tested. And that standard is not likely to be overthrown by the latest comer. A conservatism that loves the results of long human experience is something that is not to be despised. If religion is to stand, it must in some way appeal to what is true and wise in this conservatism.

I wish to ask whether a religion that is free, not founded on tradition nor on the authority of book or church, can appeal to people of such a conservative temper. I believe that such a religion in the essence is, in the best sense, conservative.

In order to see whether this is so, let us ask ourselves, first, If there are things which are better when they are old, why is it that they are so? The answer must be that they are better because certain processes have been going on that require time for their completion.

A mummy is not better after ten thousand years than it was when it was placed in the tomb. But there are things that are improved; they are improved because some processes are allowed to work which work slowly.

Now, we find that there are certain processes in human development analogous to those which go on in the wine, — those processes of slow fermentations, those subtle changes, which give it its finest flavor.

A truth proclaimed to-day may be as true as those truths which have come down from the remotest past, and which have formed the choicest heritage of the race; but it does not follow that this truth, when first proclaimed, is in its form as beautiful, or that it has all the attractive power that may belong to it after many ages.

The old truth was once proclaimed by a single person; it had not yet become universalized; it had not yet become humanized. Generations took it up, fervent apostles went about preaching it to every creature, — preaching it in a thousand different ways, that it might find a lodgment in every soul. Martyrs died for it, and glorified it by their death; philosophers sought

to find the essence of it; poets sang of it; artists clothed it with forms of beauty; simple men and women taught it to their children. At last it comes to us with a thousand tender associations clustering around it. It is not cold, but speaks directly to the heart. These associations cannot be manufactured; they are the results of slow growth. When we say that it was the work of time, we do not mean that the mere passage of years accomplished anything. We mean that slow, unobvious influences were at work, and that the accomplishment was due to them. A religion develops when it is subjected to these influences, when it continually touches human life and feels all its reactions and assimilates continually new material. Christianity has historic significance and a wealth of association because it has not been hidden in the recesses of a temple, but has had a share in the world's varied development. It has been touched by the life of Judea, of Greece, of Rome, of western Europe; it is now feeling the influence of the abounding life of America.

If it has gained something from the transformations of the past, we must allow the transforming influences of the present to have free play. It must be enlarged by modern philanthropy, purified by modern criticism; it must assimilate modern science. In pleading for this the liberal thinker is acting as a conservative. He recognizes the value of an historic religion, he sees that the very essence of an historic process is perpetual change, the adaptation to new conditions. He only asks that this process shall not now be checked.

There is another way by which things are improved with age, and that is by the process of selection. There was an eighteenth-century controversy as to whether the classics were superior to the works of the modern world.

The controversy was barren because by "classic" literature was meant books written in Greek or Latin. The value of the real classics, in whatever language they may have been written, depends on the fact that they represent what has stood the test of the criticism of successive generations. Now, the true conservative is one who, while glad that this sifting process has gone on in the past, insists that it should still go on. Not only in secular literature, but in what is called sacred literature, there must be fearless and continual criticism. You say that the Bible has stood the test of successive generations, and that therefore it should be revered. Yes, but our reverence must not make us afraid to subject it to further tests. It must be subjected to the tests of present scholarship; it must go through still further purifying fires. Only in this way can the essential be separated from the unessential.

So far we have seen that a liberal religion may be conservative of the best things of the past, because it insists on continuing the methods by which they have been made better. One may go further than this, and assert that a free religion is the one which is most loyal to what is most truly venerable.

There is something impressive in the first reading of the article of Macaulay wherein he describes the antiquity of the Church of Rome,—the church which survived so many revolutions, the church which had existence "before the Franks crossed the Rhine, and when Grecian orators still walked in Antioch."

This is impressive so long as we compare the Catholic Church with the sects of Protestantism, but it is insignificant when compared with the history of mankind. Compared with the antiquity of man, the church is but of yesterday. When we seek what is truly venerable

we must go back of these forms and traditions. Nature is not so careless as to intrust the best things to any hierarchy. The greatest results of the age-long human struggle have been organized into human nature itself. The record of the most sacred history of the race is written in the heart of the individual. Here is the living epistle, to be read of all men. Look into your own soul; ask whence came its instincts, its aspirations, its capacity for faith. You are reading scriptures older than the Psalms or the Vedas. The fourth Gospel attributes to Jesus the mystical saying, "Before Abraham was, I am." Every son of man may say that of his essential nature. The continuity of life has never been broken. Shakespeare addresses Time in language as mystical as that of Jesus: —

"No! Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change:
 Thy pyramids built up with newer might
 To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;
 They are but dressings of a former sight.
 Our dates are brief, and therefore we admire
 What thou dost foist upon us that is old,
 And rather make them born to our desire
 Than think that we before have heard them told.
 Thy registers and thee I both defy,
 Not wondering at the present nor the past."

Think of the spiritual nature which we inherit, this building of thought, instinct, desire; truly, the pyramids were "built up with newer might." The men who built the pyramids were themselves moved by the same forces which move us. When you bow your head in worship, when you feel the impulse of a pure devotion, you are at one with the untold generations that have gone before. The same life stirs within you that inspired them; it is "the old-time religion" which is yours.

It seems to me, then, that the religion which comes closest to the reality of the present is at the same time the most conservative of the best that the past has had. For the best things still live, renewing themselves in each generation. There is a natural faith in goodness that is older than any creed; conscience is older than the laws of Jews or Romans; love antedates the most venerable priesthods. He who remains faithful to the natural piety which has formed the basis of all religion is, it seems to me, the true conservative.

July 1, 1896.

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FORTNIGHTLY SERMONS.

X

The Ideal and the Con-
ventional Jesus.

A SERMON

Preached in the First Parish Church, Cambridge, Mass.

BY

REV. S. M. CROTHERS.



CAMBRIDGE:

JOHN WILSON AND SON.

University Press.

1896.

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THE IDEAL AND THE CONVENTIONAL JESUS.

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Judas, and Simon ? and are not his sisters here with us ? And they were offended in him. — ST. MARK vi. 3.

THE Christian world looks back adoringly to its founder, but that very adoration makes clear-seeing difficult, almost impossible, for we are looking back through clouds of incense which obscure while they glorify. The line of Shelley comes to us, —

“ Like a poet hidden in the light of thought.”

The historic Jesus is hidden from us largely in the light of the very thought he kindled. It is the greatest thought that has ever entered into the mind of man : the thought of Divine Humanity ; the thought that the heart of God may be revealed to us through the love, the tenderness, and the self-sacrifice of a man.

But we see Jesus through the thoughts which his disciples had in regard to him, and these thoughts have varied with the centuries. He is at once the centre of the Jewish Messianic hope, of Gnostic speculation, of Scholastic theology, of mediæval piety, of modern philanthropy. Even beyond the bounds of Christendom has been felt the power of that personality.

A writer of India in our day says: "The historic figure of the sweet prophet of Nazareth is illumined with unknown radiance when the light of oriental faith and mystic devotion is allowed to fall upon it. Here, too, in India, though latest and most backward, we Hindoo-Aryans have learned to enshrine Him in the heart of our philosophy, and at the core of our exuberant love."

But the very fact that the name of Christ has been at the heart of so many philosophies, and that the devotion to him has been so universal, makes us see clearly enough, that we are dealing, not with one historical figure outlined and limited, but with a great spiritual ideal.

A saint of the Middle Ages cried, —

"Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast."

And the modern poet seems but to echo this thought when he writes, —

"Thou seemest human and divine, —
The highest, holiest manhood, Thou."

Each one had in his heart a vision of the "highest, holiest manhood," and associated that with the name of Jesus. But were you to try to find the distinct conception that came to each, how each mind figured to itself what the "highest, holiest manhood" must be like, you would find that the images in these minds are as wide apart as the centuries in which the men lived. One would have thought of the "highest, holiest manhood" as belonging to some pale ascetic, who, through fasting and prayer, had come near to God; the other would think of the "highest, holiest manhood" as a full development of all natural powers in freest and most joyous

activity; the vision coming to his mind would be that of a "high nature amorous of the good, and touched by no ascetic gloom."

Thomas à Kempis believed in the divinity of Christ, and so did Charles Kingsley. They had the same gospels before them, but they read them by the light of different commentaries. One had for his commentary the quiet life in the convent of St. Agnes; and the other had the stirring struggle for reform in modern England. Which, you ask, read aright the old story? Which truly and completely reconceived the Christ? We can have no clear thinking, and I think but little sympathy with the essence of Christianity, until we are willing frankly to say that when we speak the word "Christ," we may have two different thoughts in our mind, may refer to facts of a different order. On the one side there is the historic Jesus, of whom we know nothing save through historical testimony. What was he? What did he say? What do we know about him? It is evident we can know nothing about him save through documentary evidence, and this evidence must be most carefully and critically sifted.

On the other hand, there is Christ, the growing ideal of humanity. And here we come to a question of history too, — only it is not ancient history, not the history of a single life; it belongs to the history of humanity. It is history still in the making. Jesus died, the Christ thought, the Christ-spirit lived. The thought he kindled shined on, a growing light to man, and "The people that sat in darkness saw a great light," and were glad.

You turn to the writings of Paul, and you find him telling how "It pleased God to reveal his son in me." And then, with still bolder idealism, he says, "For me

to live is Christ." We find that Christ had become already the symbol of the "highest, holiest manhood," — something to be dreamed of, something to be loved, to be aspired after, and, at last, to be experienced by the man himself.

As the generations have come and gone, this thought has grown in strength. Painters have tried to reconceive the Christ, and picture him anew; and men and women of each generation have added something to the picture of Divine humanity.

Paul, thinking of the spiritual ideal which was growing up in him, and was still to grow, was not content to speak of it as a rock, the rock of ages, standing always the same, and to which we must look back; but, alluding to the old story of that rock which went with the children of Israel, and from which living waters came, said, — "The rock that followed them, and that rock is Christ."

We cannot understand the spirit of Christianity till we come to see how this ideal of divine humanity must of necessity grow; it cannot be destroyed by any historic criticism.

Travellers in the tropics tell us of certain strange plants which take their life from the branches of great trees, and draw their sustenance at first from the trees to which they are attached, and then they send down slender filaments towards the earth; at last they touch the ground, then they take root and have life of their own. Thus these plants grow on, even after the tree to which first they clung may have perished.

So, I think, it is with some of the best and most lasting sentiments of religion. They first attach themselves to some conception which is, in its nature, transient; but at last they send their roots down into the soil of uni-

versal reality, and are nourished by the life of the world. The inspiring thing in Christianity is the thought that God is revealed in humanity; the thought that "the tabernacles of God are with men;" the thought that there is a "Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

To-day this is not dependent on some opinion about a single event of the past; but the appeal is to the light that still lighteth every man. The question is not, — What do you see looking back? The question rather is, — What do you find within the human soul itself? What testimony is there now of the divine indwelling? "Beloved, *now* are we the children of God;" and faith grows firm and strong, rooted in realities that can be tested every day.

But when we have said this, that there is a spiritual power permanently moving in the world, a spiritual ideal born again in each true life, that it is possible for each one of us to live that Christ-life, we may still ask, What of the historical Jesus of Nazareth? We may not know so much as we wish to know of him, but what help do we get from looking to him? I think that you will find among those who are most strenuous on insisting on the independence of the spiritual life and spiritual ideal, that there is also the most desire to get a realistic conception of the Jesus whom we have enshrined at the heart of our philosophy.

Sometimes we get at least a glimpse of him, not through the glorifying eyes of the disciples, but as he seemed to those who were about him. Such a glimpse is that which we get in the words which I have read.

He has come to his own country to speak to his own people. There is no halo about his head, no mysterious

radiance telling of a divine mission; no voice of God is heard from the heavens. He is standing there in the garish day, in the bare sunlit Jewish meeting-house. He is not standing in an heroic pose confronting enemies; the eyes that look at him are familiar eyes, his own neighbors, his acquaintances in the shop, and in the street. "Why, it is the carpenter, the son of Mary; we have known him well; his brothers and his sisters are about us; they are people in their way very much like ourselves. It is this carpenter who has set himself to teach us. We have been in his shop, his workmanship is familiar to us, neither better nor worse than that of other men." They look at him, then he rises to speak, and they listen with that most unsympathetic criticism, the criticism of commonplace minds upon something which is not commonplace. His tones grow in assurance and in confidence; and then the quiet amusement with which they began gives way to irritation, and they are offended at him.

Now, what have we to do with this realistic Jesus, this village carpenter, this Jesus who so offended the romantic expectation of his own townsmen? A very great deal we have to do.

It is natural when one has gone forth from the earth, that remembering him, we idealize him, but it is necessary that our ideal be true and not false or fantastic; and it is because he rebukes our false sentimentalism and our mistaken worship that he must stand there forever before us, and that it will never do for the Christian world to forget that its founder was indeed this carpenter of Nazareth.

There are two mental processes that are often confounded with each other: that of idealizing, and that of conventionalizing.

The great artist, of necessity, idealizes; he sees through the form to the essential meaning of his subject; the idea shines out through the form. The commonplace artist tries to do this, and succeeds in doing something different; he merely conventionalizes his subject. He neither sees accurately the outer form, nor truly the meaning that is behind it, and so he substitutes something of his own, some conventional sign or symbol, something without reality as without beauty. The conventionalized flower which he draws never grew anywhere, has no likeness to any particular flower he ever saw; it is only what he imagines a flower ought to be.

We have our own notion of what a hero should be, and what a great man should be, and we try to make the reality conform to that.

Call any man a saint, and immediately you have him catalogued; his individuality is lost. The writers of the lives of saints have their assortment of virtues, which they ascribe indiscriminately to those whom they would glorify. But the real saint comes not to satisfy our idea of goodness; but there is something original in him which corrects our idea. When first we see him as he is, then we come to see a new kind of goodness that we had not before imagined.

So, too, in the Christian world we magnify the life of Jesus; we make his cross the symbol of our faith, and all the time we go about unconscious of the men and women who are living just such a life as he lived, — his brothers and his friends, those whom he sought to be his disciples.

There is unreality about it all, unless through all the clouds of glory we come to see this simple man with the limitations of manhood, with the burdens of the common

life nobly borne, standing there. We must not only see in ideal humanity something divine, but must come to see, what is vastly harder, the ideal element shining through the prosaic surroundings.

We sing, —

“All hail the power of Jesus’ name!
Let angels prostrate fall
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown Him Lord of all.”

The multitudes might have sung just that song to Cæsar returning in triumph from his wars. But when we have sung, suddenly we look up and behold the Carpenter. He is not thinking of prostrate angels, he is not capable of being pleased at such a thought, he is not dreaming of a crown, so intent is he in the lowliness of service; it is in his self-forgetfulness, it is in his sympathy with humanity that he is crying, — “Come unto me all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

There he stands, the carpenter, and as we look at him the diadem that we had prepared seems too tawdry to put upon that bowed head. There he stands, the carpenter, one of many brethren; he does not care to escape the common lot; he walks on with his friends to the end along the common way. He has been born to labor, he has learned patience, at last through suffering he has attained peace; and all the grace that has come to him he holds not as his own; it is his to share with those who need it. His eager heart will not allow him to wait till they shall come seeking it; but he makes haste to come to them. He finds it his mission to seek, to save, to serve.

We had come prepared to magnify his name; we look

at the carpenter standing there, and a sudden silence comes, and we go back again to our own homes resolved to do his will. "Hosannas languish on our lips" not because "our devotion dies," but because a new kind of devotion has been born within us.

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No. XIX.

FORTNIGHTLY SERMONS.

The Mountains and the Sea.

A SERMON

Preached in the First Parish Church, Cambridge, Mass.

BY

REV. S. M. CROTHERS.



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THE MOUNTAINS AND THE SEA.

Thy righteousness is like the great mountains ; thy judgments are a great deep. — PSALM xxxvi. 6.

WHEN we speak of the righteousness of God, we naturally draw our images from human experience, for there we first get any idea of the meaning of righteousness.

What is the righteousness of God like? we ask. It is like a father's love for his children; it is like the justice of the upright judge; it is like the care of a great king over his people.

These images must always help us; but there come times when, as we try to apply them to the government of the universe, they appear to be inadequate. For a little while we live as in a happy home shielded from all sorrow, and the law of the household seems to us to be the only law possible. Then there comes some experience that mocks our happy trust. The tempest, the pestilence, the earthquake, — what place have these in the home? What father would condemn his child to an agonizing death? Where is the just judge who would punish ignorance more terribly than wilful crime? Where is the shepherd who would lead his flock into the desert and leave it to perish there? Yet we see

men and nations destroyed through no fault of their own.

To face these cosmic realities is like going from the light of the home into the gathering darkness, till we come to the base of some great mountain. There it stands, unyielding, as it has stood for ages, and shall stand when we have vanished from the earth. We see no pathway through it or over it. It heeds not our prayers; it cannot be moulded by our desires.

In the great mountain we find the symbol of the inexorable reality which stands in our way. For a little while we rejoice in our freedom as if it were possible always to do as our will directs; but sooner or later we are conscious of that grim necessity which men have called "Fate."

It is a moment never to be forgotten when we first learn what the word "inevitable" means. We see something which we say ought not to be, we will not have it so; but there it is! We shut our eyes, we sleep, we dream our dream, and then we awake; and there it is before us, unchanged.

If the Eternal Power is righteous, what is His righteousness like? It is like a great mountain.

No matter what faith a man may have, he at last must face something which he cannot explain and yet which he cannot evade.

Cardinal Newman, following the "kindly light" of a great tradition, yet stands before the mountain, which is as unyielding to his faith as to another man's reason, and cries out, —

"Thus God hath willed
That man, when fully skilled,
Still gropes in twilight dim,
Encompassed all his hours
By fearfulest powers,
Inflexible to him."

This experience of the hard reality which stands before us like a great mountain is the first great trial of religious faith.

There is another trial which comes when we look not simply at the fixed facts, but also at the great forces of the universe. One power must be behind their varied manifestations, but, we ask, what is that power like? In optimistic moods we think of it as necessarily progressive, and as working always for some clearly conceived good. It is, we say, a stream of tendency, and that tendency may be easily seen. It is like a great river flowing between well-defined banks, and receiving additions from either side. A belief in uninterrupted progress is natural to all nations which are in the period of growth. What goes on at the moment people are ready to believe will go on forever. Here, in America, there is an optimism that is accepted by every one without question. The popular mind takes in only one side of the principle of evolution. It is treated as if it were the necessity by which the good is always made better. If such were the case, all evils would be cured by the mere passage of time.

But when we look, not at one favored place or time, but try to trace the actual movements of the forces which mould the world, we find not only progress, but retrogression, — not only growth, but also decay. We see ruined civilizations, crumbling temples, evidences of lost arts. We see efforts after justice beginning with large promise and ending in futility. Many a good cause has also been, for the time at least, a lost cause. Pious historians have often attempted to show how the prophecies of holy men have been fulfilled; but how often the prophet of righteousness has proclaimed that the age of peace was at hand, and how often his predictions have failed !

As we watch the course of events, we feel that we are not watching the course of a river with an ever-strengthening current; we are standing on the shore of a mysterious sea whose waves are perpetually advancing and receding.

“Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal notes of sadness in.”

We stand between the mountain and the sea. On the one side are immutable facts, which are inflexible to our desires, and on the other are the tides of force rolling in from the unfathomable deep. There are those who cannot contemplate all this without despair.

But the strong religions which have dominated the world have not attempted to hide either the hard or the mysterious aspects of things. They have faced them and sought to interpret them.

When you first come under the shadow of a mountain, it may seem gloomy and lonely. The huge mass seems to shut you in, and to shut out the rest of the world. But come to live near it, and at length you come to love it. The mountain becomes your friend. It is the

“grand affirmer of the present tense
And type of permanence.”

And so the character of inflexibility which belongs to accomplished facts, while at first it is the cause of despair, afterwards brings peace and resignation. When a great sorrow is impending, we shrink from the thought that it may be inevitable; but when it has

actually happened, the fact of its inevitableness is the source of consolation. So long as we think of it as an accident we are tortured by vain regrets. We think how easily it might have been otherwise. We gain strength when we perceive the necessity behind it. The single event, if we could take it by itself, might look like an accident; but when we look at it not in its circumstances but in its essence, we find it involved in the great order to which we belong. The form in which sorrow may come to us is unforeseen, but that sorrow must come is inevitable. That death should come to-day seems a calamity that is avoidable, but that it should come sometime we know to be a necessity. The calmness which time brings comes with our gradual transference of interest from what is accidental to what is eternal. We cry out against a single act which offends us; but we cannot easily think of a law of nature as a blunder. Its very vastness makes us humble as we stand before it. We are conscious that there may be many elements in it which we have not yet been able to grasp. That which happens to all cannot be judged merely by its effects upon our personal fortunes. Our attitude becomes that of a wise humility which accepts facts which it cannot fully explain.

The sea, too, with its restless movement, becomes a symbol, not of despair, but of a deeper faith. Its rhythmic motion brings suggestions more potent to soothe and to sustain than those which come from the river. The river's onward flow suggests a single force moving in one direction only. It is the symbol of the prosperous life. But more religious significance is to be found in those lives which have not attained worldly prosperity. They have been baffled in their endeavors, and yet after every defeat have made new efforts. The waves of

the sea symbolize the ceaseless conflict of humanity. They feel the attraction of the earth, but not that alone. The sea is troubled because it feels also a celestial attraction. Watch the single wave and it seems to end in defeat. For a moment it dashes triumphantly forward, and then falls back, moaning, from the shore. But the power of the sea is behind it, and at the lowest ebb we are confident that that power is unexhausted.

All the higher achievements of humanity have this character. They are never completed, but always there is the suggestion of something inexhaustible behind them. Behind the human weakness there is the fulness of God. The worldly gravitation is never absent, but always the heavenly influence manifests itself. The very failure of effort becomes prophetic, for men are never able to rest content with failure.

The Bible illustrates the way in which religious thought develops. The prophets from the beginning insisted on the righteousness of God. But at first the idea was a very simple one. They felt sure that this righteous government of the world must reveal itself in the uninterrupted prosperity of the good man and of the holy nation. The reward of well-doing must be manifest; the good cause must be immediately victorious. Very soon, however, we find the questionings which came from those who dared to compare the theory with the facts. The Book of Job is the magnificent protest against the first crude conceptions of Providence. At last, in the great unknown prophet, we have the "man of sorrows," who was "acquainted with grief," and who through his sorrow had yet come upon an abiding confidence in God. This confidence culminates in the New Testament. Here we have the fullest recognition of those things which baffle and bewilder. We are shown

"a world of incompleteness, sorrow swift, and consolation laggard." Above it all we see

"The cross, bold type of shame to homage turned,
Of an unfinished life that sways the world."

Jesus sees the hard facts that stand cliff-like before him. "If it were possible," he would have them removed from his pathway; but it is not possible. He yields to the inevitable, and learns to pray the larger prayer, "Thy will be done." He hears "the eternal notes of sadness" coming with the ebbing tide. His efforts seemed to fail, his life was left unfinished; yet was his faith in the righteousness of God only deepened. If like the mountain it was inexorable, like the mountain it was steadfast. If like the sea it was full of mystery, it was a Divine mystery, with power to soothe and to sustain.



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